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ABSTRACT

The reasons for nonparticipation in adult literacy and upgrading programs were examined in a national study during which interviewers in 12 Canadian provinces conducted in-person interviews with 44 adults who had never participated in a literacy or upgrading program. Most interviewees indicated that they had experienced transition points at which they considered participating in a literacy program or upgrading program. However, they said, a range of diversionary factors such as life context and highly developed coping strategies made such programs appear irrelevant at different points in their life cycle. In addition, intervening factors reflecting the particular constraints of their lives (including economic factors, family and child care responsibilities, and other structural barriers) made formal educational programs seem unattainable. The following conclusions were drawn: (1) strategies aimed at engaging larger numbers of potential learners in literacy or upgrading programs must be multifaceted and address both structural and perceptual factors; (2) strategies to address perceptual factors should focus on dislodging inaccurate assumptions about the nature of literacy and upgrading programs; and (3) outreach strategies aimed at potential learners should use positive images that speak to people's strengths. (The interview questionnaire is appended, along with a discussion of the study response rate and procedure for weighting variables. A 43-item bibliography and glossary are included.) (MN)

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Nonparticipation in Literacy and Upgrading Programs

A National Study

Ellen Long 2002
ABC CANADA

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CANADA
Literacy Foundation
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Nonparticipation in Literacy and Upgrading Programs

A National Study

Stage One: Interviews from Across Canada

Ellen Long and Leanne Taylor 2002
ABC CANADA

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"Sometimes I think it's too late for me to go back to school..."

"I didn't want anybody to know how stupid I was...I get the girls at work to do all the writing..."

"It's too hard to stop working..."

"I would love to take a training program, but I don't have the money for that..."

"People will be looking at me....If they put me into grade four, I will feel as if I am stuck..."

"I can picture a teacher with a ruler tapping at that blackboard!..."

"I want to learn, but it's probably for nothing..."

"I can't just wake up tomorrow and just go..."

Interview respondents from across Canada

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FOREWORD

Nonparticipation in Literacy and Upgrading Programs is the first Canada-wide study of nonparticipation of potential adult learners. Using both qualitative and quantitative methodologies, this two-stage study builds on earlier work in the area of nonparticipation. The findings are presented in two self-contained reports, bound together. The report for Stage One (the qualitative phase) is rich in interview quotes, bringing to life people's experience of nonparticipation. The report for Stage Two (the quantitative phase) is full of facts and figures. When read together, these two reports provide a tremendous amount of insight into the depth and the scope of the complex issue of nonparticipation.

A large portion of the Canadian adult population has difficulties reading everyday materials. Twenty-two per cent of the population has seriously compromised literacy skills and a further 26 per cent can cope with material only when it is clearly presented and simple. Why, then, in the face of increased awareness and programming, do only five or ten per cent of potential learners ever enrol in a program to improve reading, writing, or math? ABC CANADA sponsored this national, two-stage study to explore ways of addressing this question.

Stage One of this study engaged interviewers in 12 provinces and territories to conduct in-person interviews with 44 people across Canada who had never participated in a literacy or upgrading program. Although the number of adults interviewed was small, the results revealed a number of patterns, thus laying the foundation for Stage Two: a large-scale phone survey with a representative sample of 866 people who had not taken a literacy or upgrading program since leaving school without a diploma.

The Stage One interviews indicate that reasons for non-participation are highly contextual and interrelated. "Diversionary Factors", such as life context and well-developed coping strategies, made the thought of upgrading seem irrelevant at different points. Yet most respondents spoke of transition points when they thought about the idea of attending a program ("aha! moments"). Then "Intervening Factors", reflecting the particular constraints of respondents' lives (e.g., financial problems or family and work responsibilities) would get in the way of being able to take steps toward attending a program.

A particularly pronounced finding from Stage One is the degree to which people are still affected by negative early school experiences. Most interview participants gave spontaneous and lengthy accounts of early schooling and thus clearly framed what they imagined adult education programs would be like.

Approximately 60 per cent of the 866 individuals interviewed for Stage Two indicated that they were aware of literacy and upgrading programs in their communities. An equal number of those interviewed had thought about the idea of taking upgrading or completing their high school diploma since leaving school. Expectations of enrolling in an upgrading program or finishing a high school diploma are highest for those 18-24 years of age and drop off at about age 50.

Stage Two found a consistent hierarchy of concerns among respondents about attending a program: socioeconomic/circumstantial and program/policy-related concerns generally rank higher than cognitive-emotive concerns(e.g., fear). The two most highly ranked socioeconomic/circumstantial concerns revolve around money and conflict with paid employment, followed by the distance of the program being offered. The next most highly ranked set of concerns is program/policy-related, including program length, level of difficulty, not being able to work at one's own pace, and relevance of program content. The highest cognitive-emotive factor is a general nervousness about attending a program.

The program format and location preferences of interviewees in this study were clear: one-on-one learning and learning in small 5-10 person groups were the preferred formats, and classrooms in educational institutions the preferred locations. These favoured formats and locations constitute the strongest pull factors related to programs.

Based on the findings of this study, and a great many others, it is clear that strategies aimed at engaging larger numbers of potential learners in literacy or upgrading programs need to be multi-faceted, addressing themselves to structural, perceptual, and program-related factors.

Ellen Long
Principal Investigator,
National Nonparticipation Study
Toronto, April, 2002

HIGHLIGHTS

Introduction

Despite the real impact of various outreach efforts, attracting potential learners to programs remains one of the most serious challenges facing the literacy field. Only a small fraction (somewhere between five and ten per cent) of adults with low literacy skills has ever enrolled in programs to improve reading and writing.

The central purpose of this study is to explore how nonparticipants frame and interpret their own nonparticipation in literacy and upgrading programs and to understand, with a fair amount of precision, the ways that nonparticipants perceive and speak about programs. The main goal in seeking this information is to help inform the outreach strategies of a wide range of groups, from those specializing in large-scale multimedia campaigns to small delivery organizations making decisions about how to reach this group.

ABC CANADA worked with interviewers in 12 provinces and territories who conducted in-person interviews with 44 people across Canada who had never participated in an upgrading or literacy program. The interviews revealed that reasons for nonparticipation are highly contextual and interrelated. Most respondents indicated that there were **transition points** or "aha!" moments when they thought about the idea of taking a program. And yet, **diversionary factors**, such as life context and highly developed coping strategies made the thought of upgrading seem irrelevant at different points in the life cycle. **Intervening factors**, reflecting the particular constraints of respondents' lives, including economic factors, family and childcare responsibilities and other structural barriers, all contributed to making formal educational programs seem unattainable. Respondents' perceptions of what programs would be like and what would be expected of them were further deterrents. And finally, respondents' assessment of opportunity and whether the investment was worth the risk played a role in shaping their perceptions about formal education of any type.

Main findings

Diversionary factors for nonparticipation

- Family, culture, daily life experiences, ways of life, community, social networks and geographical location were all factors that affected nonparticipants' perception of the need for literacy or upgrading programs. Some respondents saw little to be gained from programs.
- Many respondents grew up in rural settings. While people living in rural areas may be highly skilled in areas relevant to their lives, literacy skills may not always have been their highest need. Reflecting on their lives, many respondents from rural areas questioned whether improved literacy skills would have been an advantage to them in their earlier lives.
- Ethnic or cultural factors played an important role in many respondents' thoughts about formal schooling. Many aboriginal respondents expressed alienation from the structure and values of formal schooling, which seemed at odds with the values of their communities. These feelings were especially pronounced among those who had gone to residential schools or had been formally educated outside of their communities.
- When asked why they had never considered entering a program, some respondents felt satisfied with their skills. In other cases, they simply weren't interested, and still others felt it was too late for them to return to formal learning.
- Respondents who did express a desire for more literacy skills had developed a variety of ways to address their literacy skills. Some people described various coping strategies, such as getting friends, family or co-workers either to help teach the needed skills or complete various tasks. To the extent that these self-directed strategies are successful, they can be seen as actually *replacing* the need for a formal program from the perspective of the nonparticipant. And yet, not everyone was comfortable with others helping out all the time.

Transition points

- The vast majority of respondents said that there was at least one point in their lives when they thought about a need to upgrade their literacy skills. In fact, most cited a number of times when they considered the idea, mainly at times of transition, for instance, the birth of children or the loss of a job. Rather than identifying a particular moment or moments where the idea of upgrading occurred to them, some respondents identified their low literacy skills as an ongoing problem that they would like to address.

Intervening factors in nonparticipation

- When asked why they had not signed up for a program during these "aha!" transition points, respondents described a wide array of structural barriers to participation, including financial worries, work-related conflicts and family and childcare responsibilities.
- Women were the most likely to cite barriers relating to children and family responsibilities. A number of women spoke of unsupportive partners who actively discouraged their involvement in formal education.
- Throughout the interviews it became clear that lack of awareness about programs had been a major barrier for many respondents.
- Most of those we interviewed spoke passionately about what they imagined programs would be like. The perceptions of most respondents appeared to be firmly rooted in early memories of school. Most spontaneously relayed stories from their early schooling, though they had not yet been asked about their school experiences in the interview.[1]
- Respondents overwhelmingly said they would feel nervous or anxious (and in some cases, terrified) to attend a program.
- Respondents' perceptions of what other learners would be like were significant factors contributing to feelings of discomfort. The main concerns stemmed from having preconceived and stereotyped assumptions about who might attend programs, wanting to be anonymous, expecting to feel isolated or alienated, ridiculed, and humiliated.

---

[1] One of the central purposes of this report was to identify themes for outreach. As such, this study focused disproportionately on program perceptions, but it is clear that more work is needed to explore the respective weight of structural and perceptual factors and how they interrelate.

☐ One of the most common concerns related to what people imagined the teacher would be like. Interviews revealed again and again many negative perceptions clearly shaped by early school experiences, including a concern that the teacher would embarrass them or ignore them. Many respondents assumed that they would not be treated with respect ("like an adult") in the classroom environment.

☐ Many respondents assumed programs would be unhelpful, too long, too rigid, or taught at the wrong level. Some respondents were concerned that they would not be able to keep up or would fail.

☐ Some of those who imagined they would feel uncomfortable said they would feel more at ease if they could bring a friend or family member with them.

☐ Perceived opportunities and assessment of risk were significant factors influencing enrolment. Many respondents described a delicate balancing act, trying to gauge whether the opportunity to enrol in a program would outweigh the risks associated with intervening factors (concrete structural factors and program perceptions).

Conclusions and recommendations

☐ Strategies aimed at engaging larger numbers of potential learners in literacy or upgrading programs need to be multi-faceted, addressing themselves to both structural and perceptual factors.

☐ Strategies aimed at addressing perceptual factors will be particularly powerful if they focus on trying to dislodge inaccurate assumptions about the nature of literacy and upgrading programs. Most specifically, we need to emphasize that programs are "not at all like school." They are designed for *adults* of all ages and skill levels; they are friendly and safe places where people can learn at their own pace, usually free of charge.

☐ Combined with key information from the *International Adult Literacy Survey* (IALS) and other research, the results of this study suggest that outreach strategies aimed at potential learners should ideally use positive images that speak to people's strengths. Campaigns that reflect negative and stigmatizing assumptions about the lives of potential learners are not only unlikely to gain the attention of the intended audience, they may in fact further scare many people away from seeking help.

CHAPTER 1

Introduction

Since the late 1980s, there has been a dramatic increase in the level and type of national attention paid to the literacy skills of adults in Canada. For example, in 1987, the Canadian federal government established the National Literacy Secretariat (NLS); and since the mid-1990s, Canada has engaged, along with many other industrialized nations, in ongoing measurements of adult literacy rates through the *International Adult Literacy Survey* (IALS). In 1995, following decades of locally based outreach efforts, ABC CANADA launched a national multimedia campaign (called "LEARN") aimed at attracting adults to literacy programs. This campaign, along with the outreach work of many other groups, greatly increased awareness of literacy programs and where to find them (Long 1996) and of literacy issues in general (Decima Research 1999).

According to Statistics Canada, 22 per cent of Canadians have serious difficulty with everyday reading and writing tasks. While there are different opinions on why it is important to increase basic literacy skills, and on how best to do this, most people generally agree that having solid basic literacy skills is socially and economically advantageous. However, despite the real impact of various outreach efforts, attracting potential learners to programs remains one of the most serious challenges facing the literacy field. Only a small fraction (somewhere between five and ten per cent) of adults with low literacy skills has ever enrolled in programs to improve reading and writing. This gap between the official goal and the practical reality is nothing short of startling and presents a pressing question: Why, in the face of increasing public policy initiatives and highly visible outreach campaigns, is the vast majority of people with low literacy skills still unlikely to participate in literacy or upgrading programs?

Clearly, if we hope to make a significant difference in raising literacy levels in Canada, it is critical that we develop a more sophisticated understanding of nonparticipation that can effectively inform outreach, practice, and policy initiatives. However, compared with information about learner attrition, we do not have a strong, empirically-based understanding of why people may not contact a program in the first place. This has meant that historically the literacy field has tended to base its understanding of nonparticipation on the experiences of those who have enrolled in programs; for example, participants may be asked to reflect on the reasons for their previous noninvolvement (Long 1996) or literacy practitioners may be asked to speculate on the motivations of nonparticipants (Martini and Page 1996). But both of these approaches have serious limitations. Several researchers (Beder 1991; Fingeret 1983; Quigley 1992) have questioned the validity of generalizing between the experiences of participants and nonparticipants in literacy and upgrading programs.

Purpose of this study

The central purpose of this study is to gather information that will provide the literacy field with empirically-grounded strategies for how to encourage larger numbers of people to improve their reading, writing, and math skills. While undertaken primarily to help shape and refine outreach efforts, this study by definition also provides a rich source of information for referral, intake, and programming. The design for this study involves a two-stage approach combining qualitative and quantitative methodologies, which together, can reveal the depth and scope of the complex issue of nonparticipation. This unique study fills a gap because not only are existing studies on nonparticipation surprisingly sparse (Beder 1990; Quigley 1992), few of them are Canadian. There are only two published Canadian nonparticipation studies, both conducted in British Columbia in the late 1980s (Thomas 1990; Rodriguez and Sawyer 1990). These studies provide key insights that informed the methodology of this national study.

Stage One

For the first stage—the central topic of this particular report—ABC CANADA worked with 12 interviewers across Canada to complete in-person interviews with 44 individuals who had low levels of formal education and had never participated in a literacy or upgrading program. The central purpose of Stage One is to explore how nonparticipants frame and interpret their own nonparticipation and to understand, with a fair amount of precision, the ways that nonparticipants perceive and speak about programs. The main goal in seeking this information is to help inform the outreach strategies of a wide range of groups, from those specializing in large-scale multimedia campaigns to small delivery organizations making decisions about how to reach this group. The results of Stage One are also intended to generate themes for Stage Two of the study, which is a large-scale quantitative survey of expectations, experiences and perceptions of people with low levels of formal education, regarding adult education in general.

Stage Two

If we have lacked a clear qualitative understanding of nonparticipation, it perhaps goes without saying that we also lack a quantitative understanding. At present we have no data that could help guide even a basic demographic understanding of nonparticipation in literacy and upgrading programs; for example, national Statistics Canada surveys like the *Adult Education and Training Survey* do not collect information about participation in literacy programs. We currently cannot answer a question as simple as, "What percentage of women between the ages of 24 and 35 with less than grade 9 education enrol in literacy programs?" Nor can we answer more complex questions, such as, "Why did fewer women than men enrol in the 24-35-year-old age group?" Understanding such questions has wide-ranging implications for policy, practice, programming, and outreach.

In the second stage, we conducted a phone survey with a large, representative sample of 866 people who have less than high school completion and have never taken a literacy or upgrading program. The survey design was informed not only by the Stage One interviews, but by a long tradition of survey research by colleges, universities, and other educational institutions. This type of survey research is aimed at finding ways to increase appeal and improve programming. Surveys have the advantage of revealing the scope of an issue and they also allow for cross-tabulation by demographic variables. This is critical if we are to target our outreach efforts and take further steps toward a greater understanding of nonparticipation.

We turn now to a review of the literature that helped lay the groundwork for this national study of nonparticipation.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

Although limited (especially in the Canadian context), reported research was an invaluable part of the development, structure, and design of this study. Our review of the literature identified two principal sets of assumptions about nonparticipation in literacy and upgrading programs. Often stemming from Cross's (1981) well-known categorization of situational, dispositional, and institutional barriers to participation, the current literature focuses on structural reasons (essentially, those arising from the many social, political, and economic forces that shape people's lives) and those emphasizing human agency (the ways in which people direct their own lives based on their beliefs and attitudes). However, much of the literature on nonparticipation tends to favour one type of explanation over the other.

The consequences of this are serious. To focus on structure alone is to see people as passive victims with little ability to think about or influence the direction of their lives. To focus on agency alone is either to romanticize people's behaviour or to blame them by not considering the context in which their attitudes are formed and decisions are made. What is missing in the literature on nonparticipation is an understanding of the complex interplay between personal and structural factors. As a result, research that is meaningful and ground breaking in its individual findings can present only part of the whole picture, rather than reliably integrated theoretical models of nonparticipation. In large measure, these problems are rooted in methodological limitations (small and skewed samples) which do not allow for interactive analysis.

Most researchers examining nonparticipation have asked those who have dropped out of or who are currently in literacy programs to reflect back about their previous nonparticipation. Although more researchers are recognizing the need to examine the experiences of nonparticipants themselves, few have been able to reach this stage of detailed exploration. The few reports exploring the views of actual nonparticipants are part of a small but growing body of literature on nonparticipation; those we found, shaped our research. The most influential include studies by Beder (1990), Thomas (1990), Rodriguez and Sawyer (1990), Quigley (1992), Davis-Harrision (1996), and Fingeret (1983). Each highlights different areas of nonparticipation that, when combined, provided us with a foundation and allowed us to identify gaps to address. Through a combined analysis of this literature, we were able to integrate perspectives, ask new questions and move toward new ways of looking at nonparticipation.

Beder's 1990 study, "*The Reasons for Nonparticipation in ABE*" (adult basic education), is the largest study of nonparticipation to date. Past models have generally assumed that those who have never participated in programs are simply "unmotivated," "passive," or "hard to reach." Exploring the underlying reasons for nonparticipation, Beder offers an important counter-voice to these deficit models. After conducting a survey of 129 nonparticipants in Iowa, he found that the most basic reasons for nonparticipation were both structural and attitudinal. The structural factors included various situational barriers, and the financial constraints would make participation too challenging. Of all the factors, he found that the most influential were largely attitudinal and related to the various perceptions adults had of ABE. For example, the most common involved the perception that school would be too difficult, would feel strange and uncomfortable, or would be too similar to high school. Other significant findings included seeing no need for programs, not knowing what to expect, and feeling too old. Many did not perceive programs as necessary. Clearly, how people imagine programs and their relevance strongly affects decisions about participation.

Audrey Thomas, in her extensive 1990 report, *The Reluctant Learner,* interviewed 80 participants and 37 nonparticipants in British Columbia and compared those who drop out of programs with those who have never enrolled. Where some research camps have frequently explained nonparticipation as being mainly the result of larger barriers, such as a lack of time or money, and assumed that simply eliminating these barriers would lead to enrolment, Thomas found that such socioeconomic–circumstantial factors were the main factors only for those who dropped out of programs. For this group, being unable to meet various fundamental needs led to high attrition rates, suggesting that "everything in a person's life has to be almost in place to make it possible" (Thomas 1990, p. 82). The most common reasons for never signing up for a program were quite different, however, and revealed the importance of low perceived need and negative attitudes toward school over that of socioeconomic–circumstantial factors (1990). Research by Thomas reminds us that we cannot generalize between the experiences of those who drop out and those who don't participate in the first place.

In another Canadian study, Rodriguez and Sawyer, who interviewed 56 Aboriginal nonparticipants in British Columbia, outline the role that larger structural factors play in people's lives, through minimal financial support as well as a lack of appropriate programs, information, and instructional approaches. This study highlights the important role of access, relevance, and program availability as well as ethnic–cultural educational values and preferences.

Much of the literature in this perspective emerged in reaction to the dominance of structural explanations in the literacy field and instead acknowledges the active roles of adults in their own literacy education. For example, Quigley challenged past static conceptions of nonparticipation. He argues that to see nonparticipation strictly as a barriers issue is to "effectively diminish a perceived capacity for human agency among nonparticipants" and to "reinforce stereotypes of illiterate adults as fearful, suspicious victims of socioeconomic circumstances who are incapable of utilizing the educational opportunities extended them" (Quigley 1990, p. 104–105). Quigley provides us with ground breaking and important work. His unique study of 20 nonparticipant adults from a housing project in Pittsburgh points to the logic of nonparticipation within the life context of nonparticipants. He found that many adults do not reject learning and education but rather they reject school and schooling, because it infringes on their sense of self and their values. These may be in conflict with an educational system largely founded on middle-class values.

Focusing on the effects of early school experience upon nonparticipation, Quigley's work, based largely on the principles of resistance theory, adds an important element to our understanding, and challenges the perception that nonparticipants are passive. Quigley's 1992 report is especially valuable in his identification of three types of resisters: first, those who describe their early school experiences in terms of teacher insensitivity and alienation from peers; second, those who believe they are too old for school and see schooling as irrelevant to their daily lives; and third, those who feel at cultural and class odds with teachers, students, and the intentions of the school—for example, to prepare them for only a limited range of jobs. Quigley's work is also supported by McGivney (1990), O'Shea and Corrigan (1979), Thomas (1990) and Zieghan (1992), who add that adults from working-class backgrounds may experience considerable cultural conflicts while participating in literacy programs. These findings challenge the literacy field to see nonparticipation from a new, more critical perspective, which will hopefully lead us to consider a wider range of factors that have previously been overlooked. Though Quigley's work is groundbreaking, like most of the current literature that challenges past perspectives it does not present a broad enough picture of nonparticipation.

Not only may some people actively resist attending programs, but some research also suggests that people may actively construct their needs based on their experience and on what ultimately seems possible for them at particular points in their lives. In a study of nonparticipant blue-collar workers, Davis-Harrison found that individuals act according to what they know and understand in the world. He suggests that you cannot separate people's past experiences from their present day ones or even from those they anticipate for the future. Among the group he studied, work, not education, was the measure of success, highlighting the role of socioeconomic status and the values carried within one's social position. He found that many respondents tended to act within the realm of perceived opportunity, suggesting that if an action is not within the realm of what seems possible for them, people may restructure their aspirations to fit within the walls of what seems realistic at that time, in their social position, or throughout their lives.

Hannah Fingeret (1983) offers some similarly compelling findings presenting adults with low literacy skills as active agents in their lives. She indicates that programs not in accordance with the meaning of people's lives may therefore seem irrelevant. She also proposes that adults with low literacy skills are not necessarily passive and dependent, but may be highly interdependent, functioning or improving their literacy skills within the context of their lives and through the use of social networks (friends, family, and co-workers). Fingeret's research of both participants and nonparticipants in rural and cosmopolitan centres indicates that accessibility and awareness of programs do not ensure participation, nor are they necessarily the main issues. She suggests that programs must incorporate learners' experiences and recognize that many adults are able to function and pass as literate in society through the use of these networks. She also adds that many may decide not to enrol in a program because their experiences do not correspond to the goals of programs.

That programs may be irrelevant for people and that adults may actively choose not to participate for various reasons are perspectives that have only recently been explored in the research literature. What they tell us is important, calling for new approaches for outreach and programming. Further, it suggests that we may need to recognize, as Quigley (1997, p. 204) puts it, "program models designed with learners and with their unique perspectives and needs in mind.... Learner-grounded models should involve relevant, stimulating knowledge keyed to the identified needs of the learners."

The nonparticipation literature speaks to the serious need to hear the voices of nonparticipants and understand how they frame and interpret their own nonparticipation. Each study presents us with valuable information, whether it highlights the role of program perceptions, memories of early school and resistance to schooling, structural factors, active choices or the feeling that programs are irrelevant. However, we have yet to see any in-depth and theoretical integration of how the various factors affecting participation intertwine and influence each other in varied contexts and at different stages of people's lives. To date, there have been only a few detailed works on nonparticipation that effectively try to combine a range of factors into interactive models (Livingstone 2000).

By building on this past research, we are able to get a deeper theoretical understanding of patterns of participation. We are not yet at the point where we can present clear theoretical models and integrated explanations of participation in literacy and upgrading programs. Once we are able to more accurately predict patterns of participation we will be in a stronger position to influence them. This report documents Stage One of a two stage study, designed to help move our understanding forward in the Canadian context.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY AND SAMPLE

All methods of research have advantages and disadvantages. In the end, the goals of the research are what best determine the most suitable methods (Jayaratne and Stewart 1991; Berry 1998). Because the information on nonparticipation is so limited and because so little is known about the experiences of nonparticipants themselves, for Stage One of this study we used an interview methodology particularly suited to the study of silent minority or majority populations, one more likely to allow previously unknown information to emerge (Reinharz 1992; Smith 1994; Kennedy and Davis 1993)."Qualitative research is context-specific; that is, it posits that ideas, people and events cannot be understood if isolated from their contexts" (Berry 1998, p. 3).

The particular qualitative method we chose was the semi-structured, in-person interview. The interview format was kept flexible to allow for free expression of unexpected information. Another popular qualitative method – the focus group – was quickly ruled out because not only would this technique have produced less rich contextual and personal information, but it would also have required respondents[1] to cross some of the very barriers we were investigating.

Between October 1999 and January 2000, we arranged for 44 interviews to be conducted across Canada. Originally, we aimed to conduct four interviews in each province and territory; however, we could not locate an interviewer in Prince Edward Island and we were able to arrange for only three interviews in the Northwest Territories and one in New Brunswick. We had chosen to interview four people in each province and territory because, while there are no canons of qualitative research, it is generally accepted that one must speak to at least three or four people in a particular demographic category to start getting a sense of the issues. Because one of the purposes of this study was to generate hypotheses and lay the groundwork for a national quantitative study, and because literacy issues are so different in each province and territory, it was important to ensure as much regional representation as possible.

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[1] We are using the term "respondent" throughout the report because to use the standard term "research participant," given that we are studying nonparticipation, would have been confusing.

Developing the questionnaire

Questionnaire development was a multi-stage process. First, in addition to synthesizing information from an extensive review of the literature, we consulted with 10 literacy organizations across Canada to get a sense of what those working in the field identify as some of the main themes and concerns for research. Second, we talked to 20 learners in current adult education classes. After interviewing one learner at length, we drafted a preliminary questionnaire, which was then piloted with two individuals (located through word-of-mouth) who had never participated in programs. These pilot interviews allowed us to assess the appropriateness, clarity, and order of the questions. Finally, our advisory committee, consisting of practitioners and academics, was sent the theme areas of the study for their comments. The specific questions that emerged from this development process (See Appendix A 'Interview Template') centre around the following four broad purposes:

- to explore how people frame and interpret their experience of never having enrolled in a program to improve reading, writing, or math;
- to explore people's perceptions about what programs would be like and to understand more about the feelings and thoughts these perceptions evoke;
- to explore the ways in which early school experiences influence people's ideas about programs;
- to explore the relationship between people's ideas about programs and their perception of life opportunities (educational, vocational, and social).

Selecting and training the interviewers

We located a group of 12 interviewers with the referral assistance of various literacy groups in each province and territory. Eleven of the interviewers were women since the recruitment method used to find them involved entering literacy groups, which tend to have a larger proportion of women volunteers and staff. Care was taken to ensure that interviewers were, for the most part, unknown to those being interviewed; however, it was sometimes difficult to achieve complete neutrality in small communities. Given the nature of what was being studied, it was critical to use interviewers who were already sensitized through their work in the literacy field. While we could see some potential advantages to hiring learner-interviewers to conduct the interviews (e.g., they would be similar in social position), in the end we were concerned that nonparticipants might view participants as being in a "coaxing" role and communicate the feeling that "I did it, so you can too," a pressure we wanted to avoid. Also, we were not in a position to provide adequate support or training to learner-interviewers.

Because orienting and training the interviewers in person was financially impossible, the training was conducted over the telephone by ABC CANADA researchers. Each phone orientation was 45 minutes to an hour long. Before the training session, each interviewer received not only the obvious materials (such as the questionnaire, interview protocol, information on how to find and select respondents, and the purpose for exploring each of the theme areas), but they were also provided a sample interview and useful techniques and tips for conducting semi-structured interviews. This allowed for enhanced quality and consistency in the interviews.

Our central concern was to create a climate of comfort in the interviews so that respondents felt free to speak openly. Many of this study's methodological strategies were designed to minimize problems that might arise when working with people who may readily (and reasonably) feel judged, such as a tendency toward giving answers that may seem socially desirable (DeMaio, 1984), defensive, or passive (Mishler, 1984).

Therefore, during the training and orientation, we encouraged interviewers:

☐ to use an open-ended, conversational style of interview that would establish an intimate tone and allow for as many unprompted answers as possible;

☐ to approach the interview respondents as *experts* on the subject;

☐ to strive for a warm and empathetic style while avoiding the use of value judgments or opinions such as "oh, you're so right... I know what you mean," or leading statements like "Yes, but don't you think that if you just did X, that Y would happen?"

☐ to refrain from using the word literacy and speak instead of reading, writing, and math skills;

☐ to clearly inform respondents that we were not encouraging people to come to programs, nor assuming we could assess people's skills based on their level of formal education;

☐ to adapt the interview, if necessary, to the particular cultural context of the interview respondent; (This counteracted possible geographical bias in the questionnaire and proved critical for many interviews in the Territories and with several Aboriginal respondents.)

☐ to use their own discretion based on cues from respondents about whether to reveal personal information during the interview, since the need for such approaches varies depending on particular contexts (Reinharz 1992);

☐ to try to minimize possible social distance between themselves and the respondents through manner of speaking and choice of clothing.

Locating interview respondents

One of the reasons nonparticipation is so little researched is the difficulty in locating nonparticipants. Those who are the most reluctant to participate in programs may also be just as reluctant to participate in an interview. We could not expect people to present themselves readily for this study through the usual avenues of recruitment (e.g., cold calls or printed advertisements). Given the nature of this study, personal contact seemed to be the only reasonable way to proceed.

For this study, interviewers personally visited existing literacy and upgrading classes to get word-of-mouth referrals for potential interview respondents through the following process:[2]

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2. In the few cases where interviewers were unsuccessful in finding respondents through classes, they were encouraged to use their discretion and decide what other means would be most appropriate in their local context.

☐ Interviewers identified themselves as "an interviewer for ABC CANADA," described who ABC CANADA is and explained that we were conducting a study to understand more about why some people choose to participate in improving reading, writing, and math and others do not. Interviewers stressed that they would not be trying to talk people into attending a program.

☐ Learners were then asked if anyone they knew came to mind as they listened to the purpose of the study. We encouraged learners to think of all types of people they knew, of varying ages, ethnicities, gender and levels of formal education.

☐ Those who indicated that they might know people were asked if they thought these people would also fit the following criteria: that they "do not have a high school diploma," "have never contacted a program about improving reading, writing or math[3] and who, in the opinion of the learner, might "potentially benefit from taking a program."[4]

☐ Learners were asked to approach the potential respondents, explain the purpose of the study, ask if they would be interested in speaking with ABC CANADA, and get permission for the interviewer to make contact.

During the initial phone contact with the potential respondents, interviewers further determined in a short, informal talk, whether they were suitable candidates for the study. The purpose of the initial phone call was threefold. First, this conversation explained the purpose of the study and sought permission to tape the interview. Second, it is well known that having multiple substantive contact increases the trust level of the respondents and helps the interviewers to relax (Reinharz 1992). Finally, given that it was financially impossible to conduct multiple interviews with each person, this short phone conversation helped establish intimacy and increased the depth and breadth of what would be accomplished in the actual interview.

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[3] Although respondents were selected according to specified criteria and none were enrolled in a program, six did reveal during the interviews that they had briefly participated in a program at some point in their lives.

[4] Our motivation here was to account for the possibility that some people who fit the first two criteria might still have high levels of literacy skill.

Who was interviewed

Of the 44 respondents interviewed, 41 spoke English as their main language, two (both in Quebec) spoke French as their main language and one spoke Spanish. Except for the two French interviews (which were transcribed by the interviewer), all interviews were conducted in English. There was a fairly even distribution of men (20) and women (24). Fourteen respondents were Aboriginal (Dene, Inuk, Inuit, Metis or Cree). The remaining respondents, when asked for the cultural or ethnic group they most strongly identify with, said "Canadian" so we do not know the precise composition.

The ages of the respondents ranged from 19 to 74 years, although the majority were in their 20s, 30s and 40s:

- ☐ less than age 29 (11 respondents)
- ☐ 30-39 (11 respondents)
- ☐ 40-49 (12 respondents)
- ☐ 50-59 (7 respondents)
- ☐ 60-69 (0 respondents)
- ☐ 70-75 (2 respondents)
- ☐ unknown (1 respondent)

The last grade level respondents had completed in school ranged from grade 3 to 11. Sixteen had grade 8 or less; 23 had grade 9 or more. The remaining five either did not say what their grade level is or used a classification system other than grade.

- ☐ 0-5 (5 respondents)
- ☐ 6-8 (11 respondents)
- ☐ 9-12 (23 respondents)
- ☐ unknown (5 respondents)

The interview

Interpretive research is often conducted in familiar settings. As Berry (1998, p. 3) argues, "the natural setting is the place where the researcher is most likely to discover, or uncover, what is to be known about the phenomenon of interest." Unless respondents preferred other arrangements, interviews were conducted in the respondent's home to help create a sense of informality and intimacy. Each interview lasted approximately one to one-and-a half hours and was audio-taped (with permission) to allow for a high level of eye contact and engaged listening. Taping the interviews also allowed for various subtleties of speech to emerge, such as hesitations, anger, confidence and laughter.

Each interview began with an ethics statement informing respondents about ABC CANADA and the purpose of our research (to improve outreach efforts, referral practices, and program design). Respondents were also told what would be done with the information collected and, if respondents expressed interest, they were told they would be sent a (clear language) summary report of our findings. Respondents were assured that they could refuse to answer any questions they did not feel comfortable with and that they could turn off the tape at any time. Only one respondent (in the Northwest Territories) requested that the interview not be taped. The information from that particular interview was handwritten by the interviewer.

At the conclusion of the interview, interviewers collected basic demographic information, such as age, gender, grade level, primary language, and culture/ethnicity. The respondents signed a waiver and agreement giving permission for the interviewers to send the tapes to ABC CANADA, understanding that everything mentioned in the interview would remain confidential and that no identifying information would be used in the report. Finally, interview respondents each received an honorarium to recognize their time.

Interpretation of the results

Because we used a semi-structured interview format, we had some initial broad categories into which interview material naturally fell. Instead of fitting people's comments into preconceived categories, we found that by using a grounded theory approach, analytical categories emerged from the interviews. Through this process, a finely detailed interpretation developed that allowed us to see beyond existing models.

Limitations

Using semi-structured interviews is often a valuable and respected research method for its ability to generate theory and explore how people view reality (Reinharz 1992). However, like any research method it has drawbacks, and specific problems may emerge when explaining sensitive issues such as nonparticipation (McGivney 1990, Reinharz 1992). For example, despite our overwhelming efforts to assure learners that we were not assessing people's ability or trying to recruit people into programs, many of the learners from whom we sought referral immediately assumed that we were trying to encourage enrolment of those being interviewed. Several learners were either excited at the possibility that we might get through to people they thought should be in a program, or they were hesitant to refer us to someone because they believed that person would feel uncomfortable speaking with us or would not be interested in programs. This may have biased how learners presented the study and they may not have referred certain people altogether. As a result, we probably have a group that is somewhat predisposed to participate in programs.

Though this is a national study, our sample size is small and most of the interviews were conducted in one general area in each province and territory. We have no way of knowing how representative the findings are. The interpretation of qualitative findings can in many ways be subjective as all researchers everywhere are influenced by their own biases and perspectives. However, before we can attempt any statistical or quantitative exploration it is necessary first to get at people's actual experiences and understand, in their own words, why they do not participate in programs. Many of the quotes presented in the findings speak for themselves and lead us toward new ways to think about why some people participate in literacy and upgrading programs and others do not.

CHAPTER

4

FINDINGS

Introduction

In our exploration of how people frame and interpret their experience of never having enrolled in a literacy or upgrading program, we found that the reasons for nonparticipation proved to be complex and highly contextual.

Respondents described a compelling array of factors that influenced their decisions not to pursue further education. In some cases, their social, cultural or geographical context made programs seem unnecessary or irrelevant. Some respondents did not identify themselves as needing further education, while others had developed effective coping strategies that make literacy or upgrading programs seem redundant. For many others, programs seemed relevant and desirable, but social, economic, and work-related barriers interfered with their ability to seek out programs.

Interviews also revealed that respondents had deeply held perceptions of what literacy or upgrading programs would be like. These perceptions contributed to fears and anxieties about whether they would be treated poorly, or feel out of place and whether they could handle the workload and succeed. And some respondents described generalized feelings of risk that seemed to override any perceived benefits of attending a program.

The 44 interviews revealed a breadth of information falling into several broad, overlapping theme areas which are highly interrelated. As such we have used loose headings and subcategories to facilitate analysis, narrow down key questions, and identify potential themes to inform outreach work and future research.

Factors that influence program participation

The many factors identified by respondents could be roughly grouped into two broad categories, which we have called **diversionary** factors and **intervening** factors. These two types of factors are separated by something we have called "**transition** points" – times where respondents thought about taking programs.

Diversionary factors

Diversionary factors include those factors that influenced respondents' life paths in directions other than toward formal education. The responses that described these factors showed that respondents had a variety of ways of seeing or coping with their low literacy skills that did not necessarily lead them— at that time— to the conclusion that they should enrol in a program.

Transition points

Transition points are moments when respondents thought about enrolling in or finding out about a program. These times often seemed to be triggered by life changes or particular events in the respondents' lives that caused an "aha!" moment. Each of the respondents had a tremendous variety of responses to their low literacy skills over the course of their lives. While at some point in their lives they may have thought that they didn't need any more skills or that they were coping adequately without upgrading, invariably they had at least one time in their life when they considered finding out more about literacy or upgrading programs. More often, respondents identified multiple transition points in their lives when they thought about upgrading their skills. Despite these transition points, however, none of the respondents had ever enrolled in a program.

Intervening factors

These factors contributed to preventing respondents from enrolling in programs after they had recognized a desire or need to do so. Some factors were temporary (e.g., an acute health problem); others, such as long-term poverty, were more pervasive and systemic.

How factors interrelate

All of the respondents in this study were affected by multiple factors. These factors are highly interrelated, sometimes occur in clusters, and clearly ebb and flow over time. Because of the nature of the study, it is impossible to say much about the interrelation of factors at this time. However, the interviews did reveal one pattern that seemed to operate for many respondents.

Much of the time respondents were not thinking about upgrading their skills or seeking out a literacy program. Most of the time, they felt they didn't need more literacy skills, that they were coping adequately without enrolling in a program (diversionary factors). This mode of thinking continued until a certain event in their lives brought the issue up (the transition point). Before they could get as far as seeking out a program, other factors came into play that prevented them from pursuing the idea—for instance needing to support a family, or feeling they were too old, or imagining that the classes would be too hard (intervening factors). Once intervening factors came into play, the respondents seemed to go back to being influenced by diversionary factors until another event or transition occurred.

This is just one example of how the different factors might relate to each other over time. Although this study is a very preliminary look at the factors influencing nonparticipation, it is our hope that identifying and describing these factors might pave the way for looking at various models that would reveal more detail about how the factors change over time, how they cluster, and how they interrelate.

Diversionary factors

In order to consider enrolling in a formal literacy or upgrading program, people must first perceive that such a program is necessary or valuable. Our interviews revealed a series of diversionary factors that shaped respondents' life paths, attitudes and actions in a way that made formal programs seem less relevant to them. While it would be a simplification to say that these factors pushed people away from formal education, they did seem to influence respondents' opinions about whether those programs would be useful, necessary, or valuable.

In some cases, due to respondents' geographical context, their life circumstances, or their cultural background, formal education seemed simply unnecessary or contrary to life goals. In other cases, respondents found their literacy skills were adequate, they weren't interested in programs or they had developed other ways of meeting their literacy needs.

Diversionary factors can be divided into three categories:

☐ Life context
☐ No self-assessed need
☐ Self-directed strategies

Life context

When we asked respondents if they'd ever thought about taking a program, we found they began to talk about their early life experiences. None of the respondents had completed high school, and many spoke at length about the reasons they left. Understanding some of the early educational experiences of the respondents is key in helping us understand why some respondents didn't feel literacy or upgrading programs would be useful to them.

Family, culture, daily life experiences, ways of life, community, social networks, and geographical location were clearly all factors that affected nonparticipants' perception, of their situation. While many people take for granted the idea that literacy will improve opportunities and quality of life, this is not necessarily how the respondents themselves perceived matters. In fact, many respondents saw little to be gained from programs, given their own circumstances.

The need to work

One of the first reasons respondents cited for leaving school was the need to work from a young age. We know that adults with low literacy skills are more likely to come from economically disadvantaged families (Statistics Canada 1996). We also know that young people from poor families are more likely to drop out of school. For many respondents, the need for an extra pair of working hands in the family often outweighed the need for formal education.

> I grew up in a working family; I never put myself forward as a student. I was a worker full-time at 15. I came from a fishing family. As soon as I was old enough to walk, I was working on a boat.
>
> Aboriginal man from BC with grade 9 education, age 32.

> Probably the biggest reason [I didn't go back to school] was to stay at home with Dad on the farm. The farm he was running at the time was quite large, and it was getting to be too much work for one person.
>
> Man from Atlantic Canada with grade 9 education, age 40.

Some respondents left home at an early age and had to support themselves economically, which prevented them from finishing school or returning to it at a later time.

> I wanted to go back to school just to upgrade, but I couldn't because I was on my own since I was 15, and I couldn't go back to school [and] support myself.
>
> Woman from the Prairies with grade 7 education, age 37.

Others also spoke about being raised in an atmosphere where there was little support at home for education. Economic pressures led to a "sink or swim" philosophy, which meant that returning to school didn't seem like an option.

> You know I've been on my own and working since I was 15 and I've been on my own since. My parents, they raised me that if you want something, you get it yourself. And if you want to do this or that, that lowers you from where you are—you've got to dig yourself out.
>
> Man from BC with grade 9 education, age 32.

Some respondents reflected on their earlier attitudes about the world of work.

> Back then, I didn't really think about it. When you're young a lot of people think, what do I need it for? There's no reading and writing [on the job].
>
> Man from Ontario, age 39.

Others doubted they could do today what they did as young people with their literacy skills.

> In those days you really didn't need an education.... We worked mostly on farms, sawmills and things like that. You didn't need an education to work in the mines.... I would've liked to have gone a little higher in school, but that was actually impossible in those days. We started working at 13 or 14. Education at that time we didn't think was important.
>
> Man from Prairies with grade 3 education, age 74.

> Back then, it was jobs—there was lots of jobs, you could get a job as soon as you got out of school.... Back then, you didn't need that education.
>
> Man from the Prairies with grade 6 education, age 44.

In some cases, the economic and social pressures faced by many respondents in some cases had spin-off effects that made completing or returning to school even more difficult. Alcohol and substance abuse, neglect and physical abuse were often noted by respondents when they described their reasons for leaving school.

> I was 14 years old when I started working. When I started making my own pay, that's when I really started getting into alcohol, drugs, whatever.... I had no interest in going back to school.... We had a family, we had seven children.... [My wife] took care of the seven children plus me. I was an alcoholic...I drank from a very early age. I never could remember my first job.... I've had several, several blackouts.... I've only been sober 10 years of the 35 [that I've been married].
>
> Man from Atlantic Canada with grade 5 education, age 55.

> I got into drinking when I was young. Very much alcohol, drugs [in the dormitory of his residential school].
>
> Aboriginal man from the Territories with grade 10 education, age 38.

> I had a big drug problem at the time, and [school] wasn't the place for me.... It was my beer and my joint, you know. I was abused when I was young.
>
> French-speaking man from Quebec
> with grade 8 education, age 36.

Geographical factors

Many respondents grew up or live in rural settings. We know from previous research that literacy rates are lower in rural areas of Canada (Statistics Canada 1996). While people living in rural areas may be highly skilled in areas relevant to their context, literacy may not always be their highest priority or need. Some respondents from rural areas questioned whether improved literacy skills would have been an advantage to them.

> I hardly think [schooling would have made a difference], not up in this part of the country. Maybe if you're out in the cities and out further south, yes, it would've. Well, in those days I've known a lot of businessmen that could just write their names and that was it.
>
> Aboriginal man from the Prairies with
> grade 3 education, age 74.

> No, I never thought about going to an adult upgrading program. I had 11 children and there was no time to think about much else. I never heard about programs and lived most of my life in the bush. Raising 11 children takes a lot of time. I learned from the bush and my mother. We spent about half of our lives in the bush and when I had children I taught them about the bush and how to skin caribou, dry fish, and make things.
>
> Aboriginal woman from the Territories.

Ethnic/cultural factors

For some respondents ethnic or cultural values played an important role in their rejection of formal schooling. In particular, many of the Aboriginal respondents expressed alienation from the structure and values of formal schooling, which seemed at odds with the values of their communities.

> My greater educator was my father because [he told me], "You can't eat paper!" Paper learning was a wee bit too slow, when you could just go in the bush and shoot something and bring it home and eat it. But you couldn't eat paper.
>
> Aboriginal man from
> the Prairies, age 48.

> There was no time for going to school and I knew all that I had to....the land is more important than school.
>
> Aboriginal woman from the Territories.

> Back then, the only thing going on was winter fishing and a little trapping. I was out on the ice at about 14. We didn't know anything about the outside world at all. I'd never seen a train. Saw a Model T—my dad had a Model T—but that was about it.
>
> Aboriginal man from a rural
> community in the Prairies.

Some Aboriginal respondents spoke about the experience of living in predominantly non-aboriginal communities, and the response of their teachers to discriminatory behaviour by other students at school.

> It was rough, it was hard. I fought a lot in elementary, cause people wouldn't accept us,'cause we come from a small reserve...it's totally different coming to the big city; people didn't like us cause of the way we dressed, we didn't have name-brand clothes, we wore different colour clothes, they'd make fun of us, they'd beat up my brothers and I'd have to stand up and fight for them, and stuff like that....but the teachers didn't stick up for us, they'd

> say it was our fault that we started it, meanwhile we didn't, they started it, laughing at us the way we dressed, knocking us down. They'd take the other students' word over mine, cause they didn't know you well.
>
> Aboriginal man from BC with grade 8 education, age 38.

Others felt dislocated at school because of cultural differences between themselves and their teachers.

> All we had was white teachers...at that time, there wasn't very many kids going to school, there was no such thing as kindergarten, for one thing. In those days, there was discipline. If you didn't do what you were told you were booted out of the school, no questions asked.
>
> Aboriginal man from a mainly white, rural community in the Prairies, with grade 9 education; age 50.

> I guess they'd want us to do their method. I remember as a kid, back on the reserve type deal, slower pace...and the methods here in the big city it's totally different; they want it done the way they want it done. Majority of times, the teacher wants it their way. I noticed that when I came into the big city, teachers here, it's their way or the highway, you won't pass, they'll give you a lower mark... That's why I didn't go so far in school.
>
> Aboriginal man from BC with grade 8 education, age 38.

In addition to cultural differences between themselves and their teachers, aboriginal respondents spoke about how the content of their education was divorced from their own cultures and histories.

> We learned most about the Europeans' history and that and learned nothing about our history.
>
> Aboriginal man from the Territories with grade 11 education, age 25.

> They taught me about countries I knew I was never going to visit. I got kicked out the first week of French. Why not teach me about *my* culture? My mom is First Nations and my dad is German.
>
> Aboriginal man from BC with grade 9 education, age 32.

Some aboriginal respondents also spoke about the painful experiences associated with being forced to leave their homes to attend residential schools or schools in other communities.

> When I was five I was sent to a convent for school [in another town].... I lived in the convent until I was 15. When I was 12 or so I stopped going to school and they put me to work cleaning and cooking. When I was 15, I went back to my mother because she needed help. I didn't know anything when I got back home – nothing about how to skin a caribou or live in the bush. I had to learn about living in the bush and off the land. People wondered what I was doing all the time. I didn't see my parents the whole time I was in the convent.
>
> Aboriginal woman from the Territories.

> Everybody sat in their seats and they didn't talk back to the teacher like they do today....We didn't miss a day unless we were sick,'cause we lived right there...ate, lived, did everything right there. Went to church a couple times a day...there was nobody else there except the teacher [who was a nun].... I didn't like [school in those days] and I never met anybody else who did neither.... They were very strict, which in itself is all right but you could get punished – and I *mean* punished for just about anything -- even if you didn't do it and someone said you did it.
>
> Aboriginal man from the Prairies with grade 3 education, age 74.

No self-assessed need

When asked why they had never considered entering a program, respondents often offered their own assessment of their literacy skills. Some respondents felt satisfied with their skills. In other cases, they simply weren't interested, and still others felt it was too late for them to return. For these respondents, formal education didn't seem to be relevant or an interesting option to pursue.

No interest

Many respondents clearly stated that for whatever reason, they had never considered taking a program.

> It never ever crossed my mind. It's really not of interest to me.
>
> Woman from a rural community in Atlantic Canada with grade 10 education, age 44.

> No, I never thought of going back to school. I was married at a very early age; I was only 20 years old.... I had no interest in going back to school.
>
> Man from Atlantic Canada with grade 5 education, age 55.

> The thought never struck me. I wasn't interested in these things.
>
> Aboriginal man from the Prairies with grade 9 education, age 48.

No perceived need

Many respondents did not feel any need or desire for stronger literacy skills. Some respondents in this category stated they didn't need the skills to function in their jobs or day-to-day lives.

> I don't really have to write much for what I do.
>
> Woman from Atlantic Canada with grade 11 education, age 46.

> I didn't need education for working around the town, off and on, as a babysitter here and there. Didn't need education to work in the back of the liquor store and with your father.
>
> Aboriginal man from the Prairies with grade 9 education, age 48.

Others expressed general satisfaction with the course of their lives.

> I feel, for me it wouldn't do me much good because I'm pretty set and established.... My life is going in the direction that I want it to go. I'm financially set, so I don't feel I need any more education.
>
> Man from the Prairies with grade 5 education, age 40.

And still others clearly stated that they didn't feel their lack of a high school diploma did them any harm.

> I was satisfied with my grade 11.... My education hasn't held me back any.
>
> Man from Atlantic Canada, age 50.

It's too late

A common theme among respondents was a feeling that it was too late to return to school.

> I think, maybe, at my age...it wouldn't do me much good now. I'm 74 now. It's a little late in life, I think. I've been getting along pretty well, and I don't think I'd want to take any of these programs now at my age.
>
> Aboriginal man from the Prairies with grade 3 education, age 74.

This perspective was not restricted to older people. People expressing these attitudes were often in their twenties and thirties.

If I went back to high school, I'd feel—okay, I'm an adult here. I'll be with 16-year-olds. I just figure people would look at my age, and me being a mother.

Woman from the Prairies with grade 10 education, age 27.

The older you get, you don't need it.... But by the time you're 40, 45, you're getting pretty set in your ways.

Man from the Prairies with grade 5 education, age 40.

I'm getting on in years of my life, and I'm established...at my age of 40. I'll use my energy somewhere else.... It's pretty hard to teach an old dog new tricks.

Man from the prairies with grade 5 education, age 40.

Sometimes I think it's too late for me to go back to school.

Aboriginal woman from the Prairies with grade 6 education, age 37.

I'm in my thirties already. I don't want to go back.

Man from a large urban centre in Ontario, age 39.

Self-directed strategies

Respondents who did express a desire to improve their literacy skills had a variety of ways of addressing their literacy needs on their own. Some respondents spoke about their own efforts to improve their skills. Some described strategies they had developed to negotiate particular situations requiring literacy skills. Others spoke about friends, family or co-workers who helped them improve their skills or complete tasks. To the extent that these self-directed strategies are successful, they can be seen as actually replacing the need for a formal program from the perspective of the nonparticipant. However, not everyone was comfortable with others helping out all the time.

Informal lifelong learning

We know that many adults engage in lifelong learning which does not include formal education programs (Livingstone 1999). Not surprisingly, respondents often described learning they did outside a formal educational setting.

Some referred to the knowledge they gained through their life experiences—by doing rather than by sitting in a classroom.

> We learned from the ground up. We watched somebody doing it and we picked up from there. I educated myself, more or less. You learn by doing.... There was no pressure for you to get a higher education at that time. You didn't need it for the type of manual labor that we have up here. As long as you have a strong back...and [are] willing to work, you went to work.
>
> Aboriginal man from the Prairies with grade 3 education, age 74.

There was a strong sentiment among this group that programs to improve reading, writing, and math reinforce "book learning" and ignore the importance of "real-world learning." They expressed pride and confidence in their abilities, and some questioned whether formal schooling would offer them any life skills.

> Do [teachers] know what they're talking about? Do they have *life* experience? I'd rather be with the guy who's been through it than the guy who's just read 20 books about it. All they're doing is reading about what *other* people have done. You learn by *doing*!
>
> Aboriginal man from BC, age 32, and a labourer since the age of 15.

Some respondents were able to improve their literacy level over the course of their lives through self-education.

> I improved my reading and writing skills by reading everything I could get a hold of.... I've improved my skills since I left school. I write articles for newspapers and things, and people seem to think they're pretty good articles.
>
> Aboriginal man from the Prairies with grade 3 education, age 74.

> I just kept plugging away and felt more confident in the men's world, having to write things, speak things. I just had to work. I didn't feel as intimidated any more, I guess.
>
> Woman from Atlantic Canada working in the forest industry, age 46.

Respondents also expressed a desire to be independent and not rely on others. While self-directed learning is obviously a positive response to life circumstances, this self-reliance might prevent people from seeking help when needed.

> I guess I long to do things on my own, by doing and reading.
>
> Woman from Atlantic Canada, age 46.

> I'm very independent. I don't want to depend on anybody for anything.
>
> Woman from the Prairies with grade 8 education, age 58.

Not everyone who leaves school early has literacy problems. Many respondents reported high levels of literacy and ability to function in their communities, regardless of education.

> Even though I got [only] my grade 10...at my workplace I do proofreading, I do everything. So it didn't actually affect me by not finishing—even, like, in my math.... I do all of that myself. There's no one else to help me. I'm capable of doing all that. It

> hasn't been a big issue. This is probably the reason I never went back: I never had any problems. I actually taught my husband how to read. I read to him every night for the first five years of our marriage.
>
> Woman from Atlantic Canada with grade 10 education, age 44.

Using social networks and coping strategies

Some respondents relied on social networks of peers, family, neighbours, co-workers, or other acquaintances. This type of finding has been extensively documented by Hannah Fingeret (1983). For some respondents, social networks provided access to the upgrading they need while other respondents used their social networks as a tool to accomplish tasks requiring literacy.

> I've worked around reading and writing all my life and gotten real good at it.... I'm set in my ways. I get help any time I need help on reading, now, because I have a lot of friends and family. So I can work around it so easily.
>
> Man from the Prairies with grade 5 education, age 40.

> The work I had to do then was raising children and, you know, doing the bookkeeping. I had a little struggle with that, but I just got the help of other people who knew how to do it. I didn't think about it at that time.... I guess I always found the help I needed, rather than going back to school.
>
> Woman from Atlantic Canada, age 46.

> My daughter is already helping me learn a bit of reading.
>
> French-speaking woman from Quebec, age 32.

Not everyone who said they needed help from others with reading and writing in their daily routines felt comfortable in seeking that help openly. Some felt a need to be strategic in how they sought help from others. In some cases, it affected their social choices, limiting the people with whom they could associate. In other cases, it narrowed their range of job possibilities.

> That's why I became a cleaner, 'cause you don't need an education to be a cleaner...and then I was a cleaner most of my life. My reading isn't that bad, but when it comes to spelling, all the letters are there but it's not the right order.... I didn't want anybody to know how stupid I was.... I get the girls [at work] to do all the writing.
>
> Woman from the Prairies with grade 7 education, age 37.

Transition points

The vast majority of respondents said that they had at least one point in their life when they thought about upgrading their literacy skills. In fact, many cited a number of times in their life when they considered returning to school. When asked if they had ever considered seeking out a program, respondents often remembered times of transition in their lives—for instance, the birth of their children or the loss of a job—that led them to think about upgrading. Some respondents, rather than identifying a particular moment or moments that occurred to them, identified their low literacy skills as an ongoing problem that they would like to address.

Respondents' reasons for considering returning to school included:

☐ Helping children
☐ Personal satisfaction
☐ Increased independence and control
☐ Better job prospects

Helping children

Many respondents said their desire to upgrade was related to their children.

> Back then, I didn't really think about it.... [But now] I've got the two kids, right...to help the kids out...help them do their homework. That's the reason why [I'd like to go back to school]....
>
> Man from a large urban centre in Ontario, age 39.

Personal satisfaction

Respondents spoke about the personal satisfaction they would gain from improving their literacy skills.

> I'd like to wear that cap and gown one day.
>
> Woman from the Prairies with grade 10 education, age 27.

> I always wanted to finish grade 12.
>
> Woman from the Territories
> with grade 10 education, age 41.

Others referred to finishing their high school diploma as a dream.

> Through my mind, I don't know, I dream about it, then I wake up—just a dream type of deal.
>
> Man from BC with grade
> 8 education, age 38.

Some spoke about the social status they felt they would gain in their community by improving their skills.

> I thought of some type of program...to better myself somehow—to bring my education up to a level where I could go out into the community and sit or stand beside other people that have an education, and be at the same level with them.
>
> Man from the Prairies with
> grade 9 education, age 50.

Increased independence and control

One of the most common transition points respondents described was being faced with a task that they could not complete. Respondents expressed feelings of dependence and frustration in these situations, and the desire to have more control over their environment.

> When I have to go do something, fill out something, sometimes I can't do it. I have to ask someone to help me and that's when I think I should take my upgrading.
>
> Aboriginal woman from the Prairies
> with grade 6 education, age 37.

> I find that once you got out of school the education seemed to be quite important—to read things, to do applications. Because you kind of need this; it's almost like a language. And if you don't speak it, you don't do it, and that makes it tougher.
>
> Man from the Prairies with grade 5
> education, age 40.

Better job prospects

Economic opportunity was one of the other main factors respondents cited when they spoke about returning to school. Respondents clearly perceived their job prospects as limited because of their low literacy skills.

> If I could change things, I never would have quit school for sure. You need the education [for] every job there is...even a janitor's job.
>
> Man from the Prairies with grade 6 education, age 44.

> I just want to get back to school. You can't do a lot without your grade 12. I have only got about grade 10.... I think I would take it more seriously [now]. You can't do nothing without a grade 12.
>
> Man from the Territories with grade 10 education, age 19.

While many respondents referred to occupational goals or desires, they also perceived the avenues to those goals had been cut off.

> I want to better myself...because when you don't have no education, there's not much out there in jobs...[just] waitress[ing], and I was tired of doing that. I wanted to run a restaurant, but my reading level is at grade 5.
>
> Woman from the Prairies with grade 8 education, age 58.

Intervening factors

Most of the respondents said they had considered taking a program at some point in their life. However, the factors that prevented them from them from enrolling even though they wanted or needed to are compelling and wide-ranging. Not only did respondents face childcare needs, economic insecurity and health problems, they also described a variety of beliefs and fears about what enrolling in a program would feel like. And they engaged in a delicate balancing act, trying to gauge whether the opportunity of enrolling in a program would outweigh the risks.

Some of these intervening factors are related to concrete structural issues in respondents' lives, and some are related to their beliefs and fears. Nonetheless, they are similar in that they are all factors that interfered with respondents' idea of attending a program.

They include:

- ☐ Socioeconomic–circumstantial factors
- ☐ Work–related barriers
- ☐ Money and financial constraints
- ☐ Children and family responsibilities
- ☐ Transportation and health problems
- ☐ Program perceptions
- ☐ Program availability and visibility
- ☐ Nervousness, anxiety and terror
- ☐ Not knowing what to expect
- ☐ Perceptions of other learners
- ☐ Perceptions of the teacher
- ☐ Perceptions of the structure and content of programs
- ☐ Perceived opportunity and assessment of risk
- ☐ Inability to imagine life without barriers
- ☐ Am I worth it?
- ☐ Is it worth it?
- ☐ Getting over the hump
- ☐ I would enrol in a program

Socioeconomic–circumstantial factors

Unprompted, most respondents described various socioeconomic–circumstantial barriers when asked why they had not enrolled in a program. The reality of these types of constraints is compelling. Respondents described work-related barriers, general economic constraints, childcare and family responsibilities, and transportation and health issues.

Respondents usually listed several socioeconomic and circumstantial barriers affecting their decision not to enrol and indicated that it is often too difficult to manage all their responsibilities in life and simultaneously take a program.

> There's a lot of factors.... If you want to go to school, you've got to have money; you've got to have somebody look after your kids; you've got to—plus, it was too much for me to look after the kids and the house, everything. It was too much, and school was the last thing on my list.
>
> Woman from BC with grade 10 education, age 39.

Work–related barriers

The respondents in this study were fairly likely to have had unskilled or semi-skilled work. We know these types of jobs often pay less, require longer or unpredictable hours, and can be more physically demanding than skilled or white-collar work.

Many respondents were in unstable job situations, leading to concerns that they could easily and unexpectedly be put out of work. Moreover, such jobs often did not offer the flexibility to take time out of their work schedule to attend a program. Many respondents said they did not feel they were in a comfortable position to ask for flexible hours.

> I want to wait until I'm in the union...then I can maybe take [a course].
>
> Woman from Ontario with grade 10 education, age 36.

> It's too hard to stop working.
>
> Aboriginal woman from the Territories with grade 8 education, age 52.

> I will not quit my job to go to school.
>
> French-speaking woman from Quebec, age 32.

Some respondents also said they didn't have enough time to attend programs because of their work obligations.

> I don't know where to fit it in.... By the time you get home from work, the day's shot!
>
> Woman from the territories with grade 9 education, age 43.

> But now I'm working; bills to pay.... I've got a family now.... I just haven't had the time. I've been working; I'm always doing something. I don't see how I'm going to do it when I'm so busy.
>
> Aboriginal man from the Prairies with grade 6 education, age 44.

> I want to do it on my own; but the calendar has only so many places, and there isn't room to do everything.
>
> French-speaking woman from Quebec, age 32.

Shift work and seasonal employment added to the difficulty of returning to school.

> I've always worked seasonal jobs or, you know, a year here, a year there; and so work was always a need. So that just kind of put education in the background there, for a while.
>
> Woman from Atlantic Canada with grade 10 education, age 37.

> If I go to school I'm not going to have no time to do anything no more.... I work all day, and then you don't feel like going to school at night, especially [when] you get up early in the morning—six o'clock in the morning you go to work—and you're not going to feel like spending three hours in the classroom.... You just want to go home and relax.
>
> Man from an urban centre
> in Ontario, age 39.

Money and financial constraints

Generalized concerns about money were also common among those we interviewed. Many felt they could not afford to attend a program.

> I'd be receiving my pension before I paid off all my debts.
>
> Woman from the Territories with grade
> 10 education, age 41.

> I guess when I was first married, and for a few years after that, I thought of it. But I just couldn't. I just didn't have the time...or the money. I was working at the store. You don't make much money, working in a store. It was money, really.
>
> Man from Atlantic Canada with grade
> 9 education, age 70.

In addition, respondents from areas of the country where fees are charged for training and upgrading programs faced even more economic barriers.

> The programs they offer cost money and I don't have the money to put out. What's holding me back is life commitments, and the programs are too expensive for the average guy to afford and support himself.
>
> Man from the Prairies with grade 8
> education, age 41.

> I would love to [take a training program], but I don't have the money for that.
>
> Spanish-speaking woman from the Prairies taking English as a second language, age 27.

> I don't have the money to pay for a tutor.
>
> Man from the Prairies with grade 8 education, age 41.

One woman had actually contacted a program but decided against pursuing it because of the cost.

> I was living with [a man] and they said that because he made good dollars that he would have to pay. And I thought, well, this is *me*. I'm not married to him; he shouldn't have anything to do with what I do. This is my decision. I think that's what did it right there. I didn't want him to pay.... I didn't think it was fair that he should have to pay for something that I did or didn't do long before I met him.
>
> Woman from the Prairies with grade 8 education, age 58.

Children and family responsibilities

One of the most frequently mentioned barriers was responsibility for children and family. Since women tend to still bear primary responsibility for child rearing in Canadian society, it follows that the respondents most often citing barriers relating to children and family responsibilities were women. In addition to various family responsibilities, a number of women spoke of unsupportive partners who actively discouraged their involvement in formal education.

Many women wanted to be home, available to their children.

> I am 32 years old and the only excuse that I have [for not enrolling] is that I do not want to ignore my children. I can't return home after them. They would be alone at home—I would finish at four o'clock, and they arrive at three-thirty.
>
> French-speaking woman from Quebec, age 32.

Some women were discouraged by partners from improving their literacy skills because it was seen to conflict with their role as a mother and wife.

> Their father was right against it too, you know. He was against me going, he was the type of person that, well, you know, the mother should stay at home, she doesn't need to be smart, she doesn't need to know anything. But it comes in handy, because—you never know—like, marriage is okay, but you never know if it's going to last or not. And if you end up like me, on your own with no education, nothing, you end up a loafer, because you can't go out and get a job because of your schooling.
>
> Woman from BC with grade 10 education, age 39.

Many could not find adequate childcare because it was unavailable, and others could not afford it.

> Who's going to take care of my baby while I go?
>
> Woman from BC with grade 11 education, age 21.

> Childcare, big time. It's expensive. I have two kids, so for two of my kids it's three bucks apiece—six bucks an hour if I do that. That's more than I make!
>
> Woman from the Prairies with grade 7 education, age 36.

Some of the respondents were single mothers. The absence of other adults who could contribute economically, assist with childcare and take on other family responsibilities added additional pressure.

> It's kind of difficult. I have to pay rent and I have to [find] daycare. Most of the daycares are full and I don't like changing my son from school to school.... [My pay is] not enough to cover the rent and buy food. And my son, he grows out of his pants and

> shoes and clothes so fast so I have to...buy more, so it's kind of difficult...and I'm a single mom, too. It's difficult. I want to, but it's just kind of difficult. I want to make sure my rent is paid, first.
>
> Woman from Ontario with grade 10 education, age 36.

Transportation and health problems

Some respondents were unable to enrol because they could not find or afford adequate transportation to a program. Others were physically unable because of health reasons.

> I wouldn't mind taking [upgrading courses], but I didn't even have a vehicle. That's one of the reasons why I never went back, to try to go to school. I can't get a ride—I live way out in [a very rural, isolated community].
>
> Woman from the Prairies with grade 6 education, age 37.

> It never worked out for me. I had to walk far—it is far.... So I would always be late.
>
> French-speaking woman from Quebec, age 32.

> I've got problems up the yin-yang with my health. So, I'm trying to get them sorted out, and I've taken the past year to do that. So I'm looking maybe in about 2000, 2001, going back to school. But it's going to take me that long with pills and stuff to get my health back.
>
> Woman from BC with grade 11 education, age 21.

Program perceptions

Because of how our sample was chosen, it is not surprising that all the respondents had heard of programs by the time of their interview. However, throughout the interviews it became clear that lack of awareness had been a major barrier for many of them previously.

Program availability and visibility

When asked why they didn't seek out a program at various points in their lives, some people reported that **they were unaware of programs or where to find them**, that they had difficulty finding information or that there were no programs available in their communities.

> Without an education, someone can't go very far in life. But looking back a few years ago, the opportunity wasn't there, or the programs weren't there, for people to go to or get involved with. If I had the opportunity or chance to take whatever program was there, my lifestyle would probably be different today.
>
> Man from the Prairies with grade 9 education, age 50.

> There was nothing out there for me education-wise, or resource people or anybody to point me in the right direction in what to do at that time.
>
> Man from the Prairies with grade 9 education, age 50.

> I didn't know who to ask, who to talk to, where to go.
>
> Woman from the Prairies with grade 6 education, age 37.

> I didn't know where to ask for the right help 20 years ago.
>
> Woman from the Territories with grade 11 education, age 55.

> I didn't know there were adult learning classes at that time.
>
> Woman from the Prairies with grade 10 education, age 27.

One respondent had tried to contact a program but **did not get a response back**. She was discouraged from enrolling or from calling again.

> I'm trying to work myself to go back to school—all this time to wanting to go back to school—and then you phone that school and they don't call you back. That turned me right off. I mean, the fact that it took me this long to go and they don't get back to you, then I get no response.
>
> Woman from the Prairies with grade 10 education, age 27.

However, by the time they were interviewed, most respondents knew that programs existed and had been interested in participating at some point in their lives, or were still interested.

Engaging respondents in a visualization process revealed that although most of them had never set foot inside a program, they had complex attitudes, feelings, assumptions, and expectations about what a program would be like. Picturing what programs might be like evoked many strong feelings and reactions. Respondents spoke about not knowing what to expect and described a number of fears, expectations and assumptions about the other learners, the teachers and the structure and content of programs.

Some of the respondents' perceptions stem from realities in their community or came through word-of-mouth. However, it appears that the perceptions of most respondents were rooted in early memories of school. Many relayed stories from their early school experience when describing how they pictured programs, even though they had not yet been asked about their school experiences in the interview.

> Some people have said to me, "Well, how come you didn't go back to school?" I say because I hated school. I actually hated it. It wasn't a nice experience.
>
> Woman from the Prairies with grade 6 education, age 37.

> When you go back to school you feel like a kid again...you'll think back to junior high, grade 7 and 8, and when you're there on your first day. I can just visualize myself; wow, this is like, memory [laughter]. But I have to remember that it's not what that would be. It's not; it's actually adult learning.
>
> Woman from the Prairies with grade 10 education, age 27.

> I always wanted to go back to school, but I always had a hard time in school.... I didn't want to have a hard time again.
>
> Woman from Atlantic Canada with grade 6 education, age 51.

Nervousness, anxiety and terror

Respondents overwhelmingly said they would feel nervous attending a program, though in different degrees and strengths. Some of the respondents expressed the degree of nervousness that would naturally be associated with **starting something new**.

> Nervous; don't know what to expect. Hard to say.... [I] haven't been in school before.
>
> Aboriginal man from the Territories with grade 11 education, age 25.

> Nervous and shy, 'cause I wouldn't know what to expect from this program.
>
> Woman from Atlantic Canada with grade 10 education, age 44.

> Nervous and shy, waiting for someone else to make the first move; then I'd open up.
>
> Aboriginal man from BC with grade 9 education, age 32.

For others, this nervousness was directly related to the program itself and rooted in some **deeper concerns**.

> I'm nervous already.... I'd get a big lump in my throat and my stomach is all jittery. I'd be checking out the other people in the room.... I'd look for a corner [in the room] 'cause I like corners.
>
> Woman from the Prairies with grade 8 education, age 58.

> Apprehension, big apprehension. About people I might be meeting, am I going to be able to handle the workload, am I going to be able to keep up with the course?
>
> Man from the Prairies with grade 8 education, age 41.

> Nervous, scared...butterflies. I was always scared in school.
>
> Woman from the Prairies with grade 7 education, age 36.

But many feelings were much more intense and went beyond nervousness. Sometimes people imagined they would be **extremely anxious**.

> Anxiety, straight off the bat.... Rushed anxiety, frazzled, probably chain-smoking.
>
> Woman from BC with grade 11 education, age 21.

> It's like I get knots in my stomach. I'd wonder if I was the oldest one there, if people were going to be a lot younger than me. These things go through your head. I'd be hoping the other students would be friendly; you don't want crabby people. I wouldn't want to get my eyes poked out or be wondering if someone was going to shoot me.
>
> Woman from Ontario with grade 11 education, age 44.

Some felt they would become quite **restless and even agitated** in a program.

> So if I went into the classroom, I'd be sitting there going crazy.... I don't think I'd be able to challenge it. I'd be taking all day to get one answer. I don't have the patience to sit there for that long. I'd have to have time out to get my head together. I'm claustrophobic if I don't move around. Then, when I get myself calmed down, I could come back to it. But if I had to sit there trying to get an answer, you'd be calling for a straitjacket.
>
> Woman from Ontario with grade 11
> education, age 44.

Others imagined being **terrified** when they pictured themselves in a classroom setting.

> Short of breath...I [would] feel like vomiting...because when I arrive, there will be strangers that will judge me. People will be looking at me.... If they put me into grade 4, I will feel as if I am stuck.
>
> French-speaking woman from
> Quebec, age 32.

Not knowing what to expect

Although some of the people interviewed had clear expectations about what they would find in a program and knew why this would make them hesitant to enrol, others could not fully explain why they would feel uncomfortable.

Many admitted that not knowing what they would find in a program was a major factor not only in why they were reluctant to enrol, but also why they imagined they would be nervous, anxious and sometimes terrified. Feelings of **unfamiliarity and uncertainty** were expressed again and again as major points of concern. For many, not knowing what to expect automatically led to assumptions based on their own memories and previous experiences.

> You would definitely think twice and wonder what to expect, for sure, after not going to school for so many years. Also, thinking about the people who are also going to participate in the program; what's involved in the program; is it going to be complicated?
>
> Aboriginal man from the Prairies with grade 9 education, age 50.

> It would probably take me a little while to feel comfortable. That's the main thing with me. If I don't feel comfortable in any kind of situation, then I'm just not 100 per cent there. That would be my fear.
>
> Woman from BC with grade 10 education, age 39.

> At a loss.... I'd want to know, who is the teacher? Where should I sit? I don't want to sit in front where everybody could stare at me.
>
> Woman from Ontario with grade 10 education, age 36.

Some of those who imagined they would feel uncomfortable said they would feel more at ease if they could **bring a friend or family member** with them. This, they believed, would ease some of the nervousness.

> If I can find a friend to go back to school with, I'd probably go.... If I have someone to go with, I can probably just walk in there with my head up.
>
> Woman from the Prairies with grade 10 education, age 27.

> I've been out for so long that I need somebody to keep me in line, kind of [to get that] motivation.
>
> Woman from the Territories with grade 10 education, age 41.

> I need someone to be there with me.
>
> Woman from Ontario with grade 3 education, age 21.

> If I have to go to school, I want someone there with me that I know, who can help me understand more than going on my own.
>
> Aboriginal woman from the Prairies with grade 6 education, age 37.

Perceptions of other learners

Respondents' perceptions of what other learners would be like were significant factors contributing to their feelings of discomfort. Some worried that others might know more than they did, or that they would feel like outsiders. Some expressed strong **preconceived and** (in some cases) **stereotyped assumptions** about who might attend programs.

> This isn't fair, but to me they'd seem to be— obviously *uneducated* [said in a hushed tone]— whatever that looks like.
>
> Woman from Atlantic Canada with grade 11 education, age 46.

> The others in the class must be just about as sorry-assed sons of bitches as me [boisterous laughter]. They must have missed out too, when they were younger.
>
> Man from the Prairies with grade 8 education, age 41.

> I'd be the centre of attention, 'cause I'm not Native.... I don't think I would feel comfortable sitting at a table being the only white person there.
>
> Woman from the Prairies with grade 10 education, age 27.

Many said they **wanted to be anonymous** in a program and worried about whether they would be recognized.

> I thought about it and thought, no—there's too many people I know, here. I want to go somewhere where I'm not well known and I won't get distracted, where I can concentrate. I don't mind making new

> friends, but if somebody knows me...we'll be chit-chatting and won't be studying. It would be more relaxing somewhere else; I'd be paying attention to the instructor.
>
> Aboriginal man from BC with grade 8 education, age 38.

> Scared, to see who's there—to see who's going to recognize me there.
>
> Woman from the Prairies with grade 6 education, age 37.

Many of those who expected to feel **isolated or alienated** also assumed that they would not be able to relate to other learners or imagined that they would not fit in. Many expected that they would find considerable differences between themselves and those attending.

> I'm a total outsider and they are this clique, you know.
>
> Woman from BC with grade 11 education, age 21.

> I'd find some of them snobby—[other people in the room would] think they're better than I am.
>
> Woman from the Prairies with grade 8 education, age 58.

> It's my *way* of thinking compared to theirs. They never lived in the dark, as I have. They probably never experienced the hell I went through. That's why I separate myself from them. In a way, it is very hard to make another person understand what I went through—in school, outside of school, at home, outside of home.
>
> Man from the Prairies with grade 9 education, age 48.

> I just feel like I'm a nuisance to [the teachers at the college]. I don't think I fit there, for some reason.
>
> Woman from the Territories with grade 10 education, age 41.

One of the most striking and common perceptions of the respondents was that **other learners would laugh at them**. Some were sure that the others in the class would know more or would be smarter, and that this would lead to being **ridiculed and humiliated**.

> I'd feel scared.... I'm afraid someone else will be smarter than me in the class, and they'll call me names and stuff like that.... You know they're looking at me funny, "That guy doesn't know the right answer to questions" type of deal. Say, for instance, the teacher asks me to go up to the chalkboard or something and there's a question up there and...I don't know the answer...and the whole class will laugh or something.... Or they're social to your face, but later on down the line, you hear, "Ha ha, that guy—why's he wasting his time here?"
>
> Aboriginal man from BC with grade 8 education, age 38.

> If I'm nervous and I don't understand the question... the other students might start laughing.... I don't want to get embarrassed.... It happens.... Stuff like that happens -- it happens a lot.
>
> Man from Ontario, age 39.

> You always want to go back to school—and then you figure the classmates and others might laugh at you, you know, 'cause you don't know this, 'cause you're that [much] older.... Like, right now people would laugh at me [because] I don't know how to read or write, or answer that question or do mathematics.... You always have some people laughing at you.
>
> Man from the Prairies with grade 6 education, age 44.

> I guess it would be in the back of my mind – am I going to be the dumbest person in here? If I was in a room full of 10 guys who were smarter than me, I'd just keep my mouth shut 'cause I just wouldn't want to be looked down upon. I just don't like people looking down on me. I don't want to give someone an excuse to talk about me. I'd rather say nothing.
>
> Aboriginal man from BC with grade 9 education, age 32.

Some people immediately imagined they would have to **sit in a class with younger students**. They were concerned that they would feel intimidated and uncomfortable; the possible presence of younger students added to their nervousness and anxiety. This sentiment echoed the fear mentioned earlier that some respondents felt it was **too late** for them.

> I reach 40 and I have to go back and see younger kids who are smarter than me?
>
> Woman from Ontario with grade 10 education, age 36.

> I'm so old already that I wouldn't want to go to school with young kids.
>
> Woman from the Prairies with grade 6 education, age 37.

> Younger, they'd be younger than me and smarter...20 to 21, and I'm hitting 40.
>
> Woman from the Prairies with grade 6 education, age 37.

In some cases, the perception of being in a class with younger people is an accurate reflection of reality.

> They're about my age, more between 30 and 40. But they have their little kids, age 10 and 11 on the other side [envisions a shared classroom]. [Interviewer: Does that bother you?] Yes, because they're younger students, kids.
>
> Man from the Territories with grade 10 education, age 38, who is familiar with mixed-age classes in his community.

Some of the negative feelings about being **too old** stem from having to repeat grades or drop out.

> When I was in grade 10...I was actually 18, and there was 15-year-olds in that class.... Oh, I ***hid*** my age! I never told anybody how old I was.
>
> Woman from the Prairies with grade 10 education, age 27.

Ironically, some of the younger respondents, though they were the exception, imagined feeling intimidated by those in the class who they pictured as **older, smarter or more experienced**.

> I'd probably be the youngest, 'cause that's what I've always found, like, in any place that I go. That in itself is anxiety. When you're the youngest, you're worried about answering anything unless you know for 100 per cent sure that it's the right one because you've got all the older people there and you assume that because they're older people they know something, even though we're all in the same program learning the same stuff.
>
> Woman from BC with grade 11 education, age 21.

> They'd be smarter than me...like they did it before. And me, I'm just starting out. Like, that's how I feel when I go somewhere, that they know what they're doing and I'm just starting out. I don't know where to start or what to do. I feel like I can't do anything.
>
> Woman from the Prairies with grade 6 education, age 37.

Perceptions of the teacher

One of the most common concerns related to how people perceived the teacher. Interviews revealed again and again many negative perceptions clearly shaped by early school experiences. Most recalled early experiences in their descriptions of what they imagined literacy or upgrading teachers would be like. Sometimes comments were framed in terms of the ideal.

Some people were concerned that **the teacher would simply not like them**, which had happened when they were children.

> The first image I get is of the last teacher I had in school. You don't forget no teachers—eh, I can see her plain as day right now. She did not like me at all. Today, your kids' teachers are almost like your friends; but back then they were almost, I don't know, like your enemies. It was a different world.
>
> Woman from Atlantic Canada with grade 10 education, age 44.

Some feared **the teacher would be too strict or pushy**.

> Rulers [slapping] down in front of you! "Did you do your homework?!"
>
> Woman from the Prairies with grade 7 education, age 36.

> I can picture a teacher with a ruler tapping at that blackboard!
>
> Woman from the Prairies with grade 10 education, age 27.

Others were concerned that **the teacher would be unable or unwilling to explain the material adequately,** or take the time to help them.

> They should explain to each person, rather than just writing it on the board, saying "Do it!"
>
> Woman from Ontario with grade 11 education, age 44.

> When I was young, teachers weren't capable of explaining things to me, and it was like I was always the one that started things. I had problems I didn't understand. I put up my hand and they said, "No, just do it on your own." That didn't help. All my marks were so low! So if [the teacher] doesn't help, it will be like when I was young, and it will all fall to zero. I know that I am smart; I am good in many things. But if there is nobody there to explain....
>
> French-speaking woman from Quebec, age 32.

Many respondents feared **the teacher would embarrass them in front of the class.**

> When I was going to school, I don't want to ask [questions] too many times, 'cause the [teachers and other students] get mad, eh.
>
> Aboriginal man from the Prairies with grade 6 education, age 44.

> You know it's a bit of a failure, not getting your high-school [diploma] or something. I would hope that the [teacher] would not make a big deal about why we're there.... This is what we're trying to accomplish.
>
> Woman from Atlantic Canada with grade 11 education, age 46.

Respondents **stressed the importance of having capable and understanding instructors**.

> If they weren't [well educated, with a strong ability to teach], I'd feel that this class isn't for me. I'd have to feel good about the teacher. If I don't feel good about the teacher, then I couldn't feel good about the program.
>
> Man from the Prairies with grade 5 education, age 40.

> If the teacher is having a bad day, don't take it out on the students. Some teachers have problems, personal problems at home...and take out frustrations on the students. Sometimes it happens.
>
> Man from Ontario, age 39.

Many assumed the **teacher would be from a different social class or ethnic group**, would live in a different neighbourhood or travel to their community from another town, or would not share knowledge of the real world

> If they [the teachers] are going to talk in these words like, you know, Hey, I got a higher degree.... If they [the students] know what they're talking about, at a level to where they can understand, they're fine; but if they're [the teacher] going to speak this high mucky-muck language, it's just going to go over their head and back again.
>
> Woman from Ontario with grade 11 education, age 44.

> You are probably looking at a young professional that has just been out of university or school that has a few years experience and you certainly wouldn't be looking at someone that is 40 or 50 years old... because I think that is a thing of the past.
>
> Aboriginal man from the Prairies with grade 9 education, age 50, commenting on how many teachers in his community are not Aboriginal.

Some **expressed hostility and anger toward teachers in general.**

> They just don't want to take the time out to teach....They just want the money.... You're going to be depressed with yourself. And the teacher is going to be sitting there, "Haven't you done it *yet*!?" [angrily] "Done *what*? I don't even know what I'm supposed to do, so how can I do it?"
>
> Woman from Ontario with grade 11 education, age 44.

Some revealed previous experiences with teachers that they couldn't respect who sometimes abused them. Many, remembering the **abuse and neglect** they experienced in their early school years, were hesitant to relive these memories. These experiences culminated in a **deep existential breach of trust** in both teachers and school.

> Oh yes. That is why I quit—it was so dumb at the high school.... I remember it like yesterday. I was in a class...where there were drugs. I was also in a mechanics class where we worked with cars. We did bodywork and the teacher was there. We had beer with the teacher. I was 15, 16 years old and I would go out for a beer with my teacher. We would bring money and he would give us good marks—yeah, that's the way it was in those days. Yeah, it's funny to say, but that's the way it was. We called him Hugo. "Hey, Hugo, give me a cigarette."
>
> French-speaking man from Quebec
> with grade 8 education, age 36.

> I was groped by my math teacher in grade 7.... It's still there.... After that I had no ambitions. That really put a damper on things for me.... After that I just went because I was forced to go, and I ended up dropping out after grade 10. That really stuck, you know. I would think, I'm going into this course and there's another male instructor—is this going to happen again?
>
> Woman from BC with grade 10
> education, age 39.

> A lot of teachers today are there for the money, for the dollar signs. A lot of them drink. A lot of them smoke up. I know there's kids out there that can't read and write. It's easier to learn if you know you can have faith in someone [a teacher].
>
> English-speaking man from Quebec
> with grade 8 education, age 23.

> I don't have much self-esteem.... Yes, I want to return to school, but before that I have to get myself straight, to work out my problems.... I don't trust anybody. I don't trust men.... Those are the reasons that I am afraid of going back to school.
>
> Woman from French Quebec, age 32.

> They didn't know—when I was young I had problems. I don't know if I should say, but I was molested when I was young, so I had so much to say when I was younger.? That is one of the reasons that I have problems coming back to school, because I have so much locked up.... It depends on the teachers.... A teacher, he should see—not that they should be a psychologist, but—when...a child has problems, and that they can't concentrate, they should ask what's wrong.
>
> French-speaking woman from
> Quebec, age 32.

Some described the **lack of response of their schools and teachers to abuse and neglect** that occurred outside the school.

> I was always the trouble-maker, and if there were fights it was always blamed on me. Sometimes it *was* me, but they didn't listen to my problems. The sadness, the lack of attention, lack of attention from my grandparents, my aunts and uncles—my parents, I got attention from them, but then they separated when I was little and I missed my mother. I lived with my father and he worked, and he was just—there.
>
> English-speaking man from Quebec
> with grade 8 education, age 23.

Perceptions of the structure and content of programs

Respondents' perceptions about the structure of programs were important factors influencing why they were hesitant to enrol. Many respondents assumed programs would be unhelpful, too long, too rigid, or the wrong level. These perceptions frequently fostered not only a lack of interest, but also discomfort. Some respondents were concerned that they would not be able to keep up or would fail.

Many expected that **signing up for programs would be difficult or frustrating**, that it would **take too long to enrol**, they would have to wait too long or that they would have to fill out forms. For some, the whole **bureaucratic and lengthy process of enrolling** seemed to be enough to prevent them from taking that step.

> It's the politics or whatever of just getting in.
>
> Woman from the Territories with grade 10 education, age 41.

> I've thought about it, but the thought of going and finding all those people ahead of me—you've got to line up, type of deal. I'm the type of person, I've got no patience. I want to get right to the point and get it over and done with, but it doesn't seem to work that way. There'll be 20 people ahead of you. I'm scared to go there. You go and you have to wait.
>
> Man from BC with grade 8 education, age 38.

> It's the ***forms***, you've got to write down how come you're applying for it, why applying for it—all those fucking things—they're stupid questions.
>
> Aboriginal man from the Prairies with grade 3 education, age 48.

Some worried that **enrolling would involve too many prying and personal questions**.

> They ask you millions of questions. I guess they try to ease you in, make you feel comfortable type of deal...to see if you're sincere? or ready to commit? I just want to get right to the point and let me do my thing, do the best I can—and if you can't help me, I'll go somewhere else. I haven't lost interest, or anything; I still want to learn to read and write, mathematics and all that stuff. I know that they are going to help me, but I don't want to be tested in that way, you know. I just want to be on the level you know—straightforward, you know. No, I don't mind being tested about schooling and all that stuff, but nothing about my background issues. You know, I'm here for the schooling. That's totally separate.
>
> Man from BC with
> grade 8 education, age 38.

> Right now what's stopping me is that...every time I apply for something, I gotta have it in writing.... They want your life history before you sign up for something.... I don't know why they ask me those questions. They should know...what we're applying for, or else I wouldn't apply for it at all. They should know when they advertise that... we're applying for the upgrading school.
>
> Aboriginal man from the Prairies
> with grade 3 education, age 48.

Others assumed **the classes would be too basic**.

> Programs are so slow. S-T-O-P, stop. I know how to spell stop and all them kind of things. It's, like, for babies, but there's older people.... I want something that is challenging, something that I know, even if it's grade 10.... Start from the level that I did already...and work myself up.
>
> Woman from Ontario with
> grade 10 education, age 36.

Another reason people didn't enrol in programs had to do with the perception that they were not as badly off as those who take or should take programs. Some felt that programs were **meant for people at a lower level** of literacy skill, not them.

> I've already sat my turn in the classroom, you know. I'd rather someone else [attend] that really needs it —you know, an illiterate person, or...someone who's having a lot more trouble than I am...take my place, kind of thing. And probably benefit more than I would.
>
> Woman from Ontario with grade 11 education, age 44.

> Like, myself, I can read and write.... I know a lot of people who are at the lower levels and can't read, can't write.... I would like to help them.
>
> Aboriginal man from the Prairies with grade 6 education, age 44.

However, others imagined **falling behind or failing because the material would be taught at a faster pace than they could handle.**

> I don't know if everybody would be at the same level.
>
> Woman from Atlantic Canada with grade 11 education, age 46.

> I would be nervous, worried that I was doing the right thing...that I could keep up with this class, that I wouldn't be at a loss.... I would be nervous that the work would be too hard for me...whether I could pass the class, get along with the teacher.
>
> Man from Ontario, age 39.

Several of these perceptions stem from experiences of **being "pushed along"** in school and subsequently falling behind.

> I would like to try more questions. I'd like to learn something instead of being pushed up [through the levels], like "Oh, you've done enough in that class, let's put you in the next one."
>
> English-speaking woman
> from Quebec with grade 9
> education, age 19.

Some worried that they **wouldn't get help with particular learning disabilities**.

> No use going into a literacy class if you're only going to learn to spell cat, dog and little stuff, and not get to the foundation and roots of your problem. "Why can't you read?" "Why can't you think to spell something that doesn't come into your head?"—all the reasons why I didn't learn. That is what I want to know. And that is what I want to learn. If they were to teach me that, then I would probably be interested in getting into a class like that.
>
> Man from the Prairies with grade 5
> education, age 40.

The overwhelming perception was that **programs would be too difficult**. Many respondents expressed anxiety at the thought of putting themselves back into a situation where they had failed before.

> It [school] never worked the first time, so I [am] scared it might not work again.... Is it going to work, or is it going to be a waste of time... another failure?
>
> Man from the Prairies with grade 5
> education, age 40.

> I don't really understand; I can read a little bit, but not much.... I wouldn't know what I'm doing; I'd just guess.
>
> Woman from the Prairies with grade 6
> education, age 37.

> Maybe I can't do it, and maybe I don't have those study habits. I'm not used to reading and writing.
>
> Woman from the Territories with grade 10 education, age 41.

> When I first started thinking about going back to school, I was about 17. But then I thought I would be way behind.... Because I had special ed when I was younger, through my whole childhood I had special ed...so I was behind already, so I didn't have any confidence.
>
> Woman from the Prairies with grade 7 education, age 36.

Some clearly pictured the class as **overcrowded without extra help** such as one-on-one tutoring.

> You're trying to understand the work and you're trying to ask the teacher a question, or [the teacher is] trying to explain to you, and it's hard to explain to you with so many people in the classroom and he wants to explain it to you but he just explains it too fast, and you can't understand, it won't stick in your head.... "Well, sir, I want to learn, can you teach me?" "We got no time, we've got to get ahead in the work." I'm trying to learn and he's not teaching me.... The next day, you won't go at all.
>
> Man from Ontario, age 39.

> The only time I had confidence was when it was one-on-one...[but] they just kept pushing me along.
>
> Woman from the Prairies with grade 7 education, age 36.

Many others assumed that **the class would be too rigid and full of rules**. They often, without prompting, suggested what would interest them in an upgrading program.

> I never had an interest in a program as such, sitting in a classroom type thing. Now if it was something where someone was going to put me, say, outside all the time, sure, I would do it; but not in a classroom.... I'm not a person who can sit in a chair. I've

> got to be doing something with my hands, you know; that's me, not reading books.... Give me a chainsaw out in the woods. Show me *that* program and I'd be there!
>
> Woman from Atlantic Canada with grade 10 education, age 44.

> I think that once I got into those things [programs], I'd be regulated by guidelines, and I might want to break these guidelines a little bit. Over the years I just got used to doing what I felt was right.
>
> Woman from the Territories with grade 10 education, age 41.

> I have no interest sitting down in front of a computer. I'm an outdoor, rugged type of guy. Who wants to sit inside, behind a desk, all day?
>
> Man from Atlantic Canada with grade 9 education, age 50.

> Me, if I could decide, I would like a regular class—but all the students in a circle and the teacher in the middle with a desk that turns so each student could have their time with the teacher.... That's my idea.
>
> French-speaking woman from Quebec, age 32.

Some felt **if they could set their own pace they would be more likely to return**.

> Just—if it wouldn't be so structured, like back in high school. Like, I think I would be okay if I did, like, a self-pace or if I did it on my own, if I wasn't pressured. It is the pressure I can't handle. Yeah, to finish at a certain time, that's when I put a halt on things when I know I have to have things the next day or something, and then I get a mind block—and that's stressful. That was my whole problem in school. I try too hard, and then nothing comes of it.
>
> Woman from BC with grade 10 education, age 39.

> If I could work at my own pace. If I could come and go when I needed to.
>
> Woman from Atlantic Canada with grade 10 education, age 44.

There was clear and consistent **anxiety about being judged or measured in any way**. In particular, anxiety surrounding testing loomed large for many respondents. Some recalled previous negative test experiences.

> I don't know, because once they start the tests—that's the biggest part, is testing. It's just the tests. I had really bad school days.... It would be both the marks and shameful, because I know they'd be real low.
>
> Woman from the Prairies with grade 7 education, age 36.

> Put a pencil and paper in front of me, and everything goes blank. And my mother even had a routine of me memorizing it, all my homework, eh? I still have that.... I still get jitters and everything else [anytime there's a test].
>
> Woman from the Territories with grade 9 education, age 43.

Another common concern among respondents was that **programs would take too long to complete.**

> I'm scared about the time. I don't want to spend the next 10 years of my life in school.
>
> Woman from Ontario with grade 10 education, age 36.

> I felt.... it would take me too long to do my upgrading and take the course. I'd be an old lady by then.
>
> Woman from the Prairies with grade 7 education, age 36.

> Right away, you feel like you can't do it; you want to do it.... It takes a long time to do it, and you just get this feeling that...it takes too long; it's hard. It would be tough.
>
> Man from the Prairies with grade 5 education, age 40.

> It would take a few years, I guess, maybe longer. Because I'm a slow learner and I don't catch on to things right away, it takes a while.
>
> Woman from the Prairies with grade 6 education, age 37.

> If I'd done it right away—done the math course then taken a GED [General Equivalency Diploma], then I would've had that course behind me. But it's been so long now; I think I'd have to redo all the upgrading.
>
> Woman from the Territories with grade 10 education, age 41.

Many respondents assumed that **a literacy program would mean resuming their education at the last grade level they had completed**, and continuing through each grade until they completed all the grades, a discouraging thought. Some assumed they would have to start at an earlier grade than they had completed because they would have forgotten what they learned.

> But the thing that really bothered me is, to get the education it would probably take me 10 years to get it...my grade 12. I don't even know if I have grade 7.... That was grade 7 in 1979.
>
> Spanish-speaking woman from the Prairies learning English as a second language, age 27.

> I felt it was a very hard thing to do...to read and write and to spell. And I've gone through school. And I felt that if I go back, where would I go? Like, geez, I almost have to go back to grade 1 or 2 to pick up what I'm missing or lacking. But I don't even know if I have the ability to remember, pick it up.
>
> Man from the Prairies with grade 5 education, age 40.

> With my level of education now, it's like I have to go back and start from grade 10 because I forgot so much of the stuff—and I don't know how long that might take.
>
> Woman from Ontario with grade 10 education, age 36.

> You can't turn back the clock. You can't turn back the clock and redo what you should've done.
>
> Man from the Prairies with grade 9 education, age 50.

> I didn't know how far back I'd have to go, if I'd have to go that far, if this would benefit me. I felt it was a long road.
>
> Man from the Prairies with grade 5 education, age 40.

Some were afraid that **taking a program would entail having their reading and writing assessed and being assigned a grade level**. Just the thought of being told "how bad it is" was enough to discourage them from returning.

> I am very shy, and if I return to school and they tell me that I have to go back to grade 4, I will be embarrassed. It will demoralize me. I will be so shy to think that I will be at the bottom of the ladder and everybody will be ahead of me.
>
> French-speaking woman from Quebec, age 32.

> They would've put me back, so that just put me right off. I went back to working.
>
> Woman from the Prairies with grade 10 education, age 27.

Many felt they had been **out of school for so long** that they would probably feel "**out of the loop**," and had strong doubts about whether they would be able to succeed.

> I was at the bottom of the mountain—the ladder—and now the ladder is too high for me. I am afraid.
>
> French-speaking woman from Quebec, age 32.

> I wouldn't even know where to start, 'cause I was out of school for such a long time. Like, even if I went back to school right now, I probably wouldn't know what to do in grade 6, even now.
>
> Aboriginal woman from the Prairies with grade 6 education, age 37.

> I think there would kind of be a hesitation because, me being out of school for so long, I might be hesitant in taking a program, or thinking twice about it because being out of school for such a long time.... The biggest thing about being hesitant would be what the program would have to offer. Am I capable of doing what is offered in these programs? Because of all the time I've missed and the years I haven't gone to school—so definitely I'd think twice before taking a program. And I'd have to look at it very carefully, what was being offered—because, again, my lack of education, my lack of knowledge. What I should know isn't up-to-date.
>
> Aboriginal man from the Prairies with
> grade 9 education, age 50.

> It would probably be hard. I've been out of school for so many years; you have to start concentrating more on what you have to do. Especially when you've been out of school for so many years, it would be hard...to get back into it.... I probably wouldn't get into it...unless someone helps me and pushes me.
>
> Man from Ontario, age 39.

Many assumed that **the material today is more difficult because of new teaching methods and technology**.

> Today seems to be more harder or complicated. We have to work on computers, all those things that we never had.
>
> Aboriginal man from the Territories
> with grade 10 education, age 38.

> Going back a few years ago, as to now, naturally the advanced technology and whatever is all there. The knowledge is more, so definitely there is going to be a lot more to learn out there, as compared to years ago—even as time goes on.
>
> Aboriginal man from the Prairies
> with grade 9 education, age 50.

> I'd be right back at square one with the other people; I'd be sitting there with my head going around in circles. 'Cause I find the math today from when I went really ridiculous. It's really hard, even my kids have trouble with it, and they've been taught it. So if I went into the classroom, I'd be sitting there going crazy.
>
> Woman from Ontario with
> grade 11 education, age 44.

The perception that they **would not have the flexibility to come and go during a class was a common concern for many.**

> I've had bad experiences with the instructors in the past in school.... It would be important for me to get along, to click. And a teaching job is a hard job, I know that. But some teachers don't really put their heart in it.... I know that in the past, if I had a problem and wanted the teacher to explain something to me, "Oh well," [he would say] "I'm too busy right now." [I hope the teacher would] not look down on me because I'm 39 years old and say, "Well, you should know that two plus two is four," you know? They [teachers] should treat us like adults and not 15-year-olds.
>
> Woman from BC with
> grade 10 education, age 39.

Others stressed that **in order to feel comfortable they needed to be treated respectfully and like adults** in the classroom environment.

> We are all adults and not there to fool around. It is normal that kids at high school fool around, and that kids at high school sit in rows and the teacher is at the front, but in adult education we aren't there to fool around.
>
> French-speaking woman from
> Quebec, age 32.

> If I could come and go as I please...that [would be] very convenient with my busy life...a special program. I mean, I'm bright enough, I could probably do it.
>
> Woman from the Territories with grade 11 education, age 55.

This was often expressed in terms of **wanting to be able to have a coffee or a cigarette break as needed**.

> The only other thing is that because I'm an adult and I do smoke, whether we can just, you know, excuse ourselves.... Well, sure, you can't be out there every five minutes... maybe once an hour or something. But if you could just excuse yourself and not have to explain.... I mean, if you have enough responsibility to do this, just maybe let the instructor know, you know, smoke break; but not being forced to [sit there].
>
> Woman from BC with grade 10 education, age 39.

> There are so many non-smoking places nowadays, you have to accept that... [but] it would be good if you could just get up if you had the urge to get a coffee...because sometimes you don't want to have a coffee at the time of [scheduled breaks].
>
> Woman from the Prairies with grade 8 education, age 58.

Perceived opportunity and assessment of risk

Upgrading literacy skills can be seen as an end in itself, or as a means of progressing toward a specific goal—for example, obtaining a high school diploma before pursuing a training program, a post-secondary certificate or some other kind of credential.

One of the ideas this study explored was whether respondents had ever considered taking some other kind of training. Respondents were then asked what led them to decide against taking that training. Not surprisingly, respondents identified a whole range of reasons already discussed in this section, including life context, program perceptions, and socioeconomic-circumstantial barriers.

To further understand other underlying factors that may have influenced respondents' long-term decisions, we asked, "If those reasons [childcare, work, time, money, transportation, health, etc.] had not been factors, and the program you were interested in required you to upgrade your reading, writing, or math before starting, do you think you would done the upgrading at that time?"

The themes that emerged from this question related to perceived opportunities and assessment of risk. Respondents had a range of answers when asked to imagine an opportunity that actually was within their reach. Some respondents couldn't even imagine a situation without barriers that would prevent them from taking a program. Some respondents said they would upgrade their reading and writing skills if there were no other barriers and it would help them get into a vocational training program.

Other respondents' answers fell somewhere between these two extremes. Some expressed feelings of low self-esteem. Others framed their answers around whether they could risk losing something they already have (a job, for example) for something that they might have if everything went well. **Trading the known and safe for the unknown** (and therefore potentially unsafe) **seemed like too much of a risk to them**. They questioned whether enrolling in a program would be "worth it."

And finally, some could not articulate what would still keep them from enrolling. These respondents expressed feelings of being "stuck," said they were stalling or felt they were avoiding the issue in their lives.

Inability to imagine life without barriers

For many, socioeconomic–circumstantial pressures in their lives were so powerful that they could not visualize themselves in a situation where they did not face these barriers. Seeing "no light at the end of the tunnel," they wouldn't have thought of taking a program because they couldn't imagine overcoming the barriers they faced.

> Well, apparently, I was going no place. I wasn't interested then because I wasn't going no place.
>
> Man from the Prairies with
> grade 9 education, age 48.

> I wanted to be a teacher but it's not going to happen.
>
> Woman from Ontario, age 21.

Am I worth it?

The quotes above illustrate how strongly the issue of self-worth plays into decisions regarding upgrading skills. Many of the sentiments expressed indicated that one of the factors preventing respondents from looking into programs was a lack of self-esteem. Clearly if nonparticipants believe they are not worthwhile enough to be educated, they will not likely seek out a program.

> And the truth is, who's going to want to pay money to educate an old fart like me? There's lots of young kids coming up, you know. [Corporations] want young blood these days.
>
> Man from the Prairies with
> grade 8 education, age 41.

> I *want* to learn...but it's probably for nothing.
>
> Woman from the Prairies with
> grade 10 education, age 27.

Some respondents felt their previous life experiences could never be overcome or erased.

> Well, apparently, having a criminal record, there is no need to further my education. Who would hire a person with a criminal record for a better job, even if I did further educate myself? They would stop me in the place with the best jobs.
>
> Man from the Prairies with
> grade 9 education, age 48.

Is it worth it?

Another theme running through the responses was the question of whether programs would be "worth it." In some cases, it seemed as if the barriers to training or vocational programs also led to a loss of motivation for upgrading literacy skills. If the training course did not feel like a realistic possibility, then an upgrading course would likewise be unlikely to be perceived as worthwhile. Not surprisingly, respondents were leery of taking a program seen as the first step of a journey they suspected they could never complete.

> I don't want to start something I can't finish.
>
> Man from the Prairies with
> grade 8 education, age 41.

Many respondents questioned whether enrolling in a program was really worth the expenditure of time, money, energy, or possible leisure. Could the benefits outweigh the risks?

> I couldn't think about giving up my job. You don't give up your one job, to pursue another job, without the funds. I don't believe in putting my family on the welfare system.
>
> Man from BC with
> grade 9 education, age 32.

> I don't think I could waste my time trying to learn how to read and put [in] that time.... I value my time too much. If I went to school to learn how to read and write and it didn't work for me, it would feel like a waste of time.
>
> Man from the Prairies with grade 5
> education, age 40.

> I'd be thinking, What did I get myself into now? Am I going to succeed on this, or am I going to fail again?
>
> Aboriginal man from the Prairies with
> grade 6 education, age 37.

Some pointed out that even those with higher degrees have trouble finding work that matches their qualifications.

> Even though people go to college and university and take all these courses, and they still can't find a job with what they took up. So why is that? They spend all this money to go to school...say engineers...spend all this money and they can't even find a job as an engineer and where do they end up working? McDonald's or Zellers...right? Or they work in the construction.
>
> Man from Ontario, age 39.

It seemed unlikely that people would be eager to take these kinds of risks when the advantages of doing so were not immediately clear. Even if the benefits of taking a program were apparent, some respondents seemed cautious about giving up financial or emotional security by entering a program.

> I want to know I'm actually going to finish the program and get the diploma, and then I'll be fine off of welfare for the rest of my life. I want to try schooling and see if I can make it, before I pay all this money into it.
>
> Woman from BC with grade 11
> education, age 21.

> Some places cost a lot of money.... I'm not working right now.... You have to buy books and stuff to take this course because some of them don't supply them any more, you know, and where would that leave me? Back at square one, just like that.
>
> Woman from Ontario with
> grade 11 education, age 44.

> It takes a lot of guts to go back to school. I want to learn, but I don't have the guts to go to school. I don't have the courage.... Well, I guess I'm not brave enough.
>
> Woman from the Prairies with
> grade 10 education, age 27.

Others immediately discounted enrolling as impossible.

> If I had a rich family or something and could say, "Hey, mommy and daddy, you take care of the kids so I can go to school?" [joking] But no....
>
> Woman from BC with
> grade 10 education, age 39.

> So then I have to get a job and go to school.... Of course I'm going to fail in school,'cause that's just way too much on my plate.
>
> Woman from BC with
> grade 11 education, age 21.

Some spoke about the unplanned things that might make returning to school more difficult.

> I know I would like to return to school. I want to go back. I don't want anything to stop me. It is not just the time or kids, it's all the unplanned events.
>
> French-speaking woman
> from Quebec, age 32.

Getting over the hump

Some respondents said their hesitancy to enrol was difficult to explain clearly. Some spoke about being unable to "get over a hump" while others said they were stalling for reasons they were unable to explain.

> I don't know; I've forgotten a lot. I feel sort of lost because—I don't know, I can't explain it. I feel like I should know—so that I can help my kids, you know, like when they come home with schoolwork and stuff. I feel kind of stupid 'cause I don't remember algebra—I don't remember anything, really.
>
> Woman from BC with grade 10 education, age 39.

> I think there's just a big hump there that I never got over.
>
> Woman from the Territories with grade 10 education, age 41.

> I thought about it [taking a program], but I kept stalling.... I said okay, I'm going to do it, but I never do it. All the excuses—I've got no time, I've got the kids, I don't feel like doing it—that's the way I am if I don't want to do something. And sometimes it's embarrassing, too.
>
> Man from Ontario, age 39.

> It's always bothered me that I don't have my high school, and so if it weren't too difficult to actually, you know, get over that hump—you know, have this piece of paper when it's not all that important, is it, really. I guess I'd have to really want to go back. So far, it hasn't been the case.
>
> Woman from Atlantic Canada with grade 11 education, age 46.

> I can't just wake up tomorrow and just go....
>
> Woman from the Prairies with grade 10 education, age 27.

> I think I'm avoiding it, 'cause I'm not structuring my time so I can fit that in.
>
> Woman from the Territories with grade 10 education, age 41.

> It's not for me, but I wish I could think school is important and not a waste of time. I think it would be important, but I don't know what I could do to get myself interested in school again.
>
> Aboriginal woman from the Prairies with grade 6 education, age 37.

I would enrol in a program

Finally, some respondents said they would probably take a training program if socioeconomic-circumstantial barriers were removed. In other words, if they believed that a program could help them and there was no overwhelming risk to enrolment, they would likely be more willing to take a program.

> If I had a safe place for my baby and money to go, I'd be there, probably Monday.
>
> Woman from BC with grade 11 education, age 21.

> Oh probably, I would have done something, yeah. I've always pictured myself as, not a nurse or something, but I'm always bandaging people up. I'd probably want to do something in the medical field, and if I had to update my education or something, I'd probably do that... If I didn't have my kids I would have updated it.
>
> Woman from Ontario with grade 11 education, age 44.

> Everything boils down to money. So if I can afford to do that, then definitely I would take the course.
>
> Woman from Ontario with grade 10 education, age 36.

Summary

The 44 interviews provided a wealth of qualitative material about many of the issues facing nonparticipants in literacy and upgrading programs. Respondents articulated a variety of reasons they had not sought out literacy or upgrading programs. Their life context, their own sense of need, and their own coping strategies in some cases made the thought of upgrading seem irrelevant to them. The particular constraints on respondents' lives, including economic factors, family and child responsibilities, and other structural barriers, all contributed to making formal educational programs seem unattainable. Respondents' perceptions of what programs would be like and what would be expected of them were further deterrents. And finally, their assessment of whether the investment was worth the risk played a role in shaping their attitudes about formal education.

The findings of this study suggest some clear directions for outreach and further research, which are discussed in the next section.

CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

This study identifies numerous reasons why respondents— people with low literacy skills— had never enrolled in a literacy or upgrading program. In the previous chapter, we described many of the findings and grouped them into categories based on how they influenced the life choices, perceptions, and expectations of respondents.

We identified three kinds of factors that affected nonparticipation. First, we found **diversionary factors**, relating to social status, life context and life experience, that influenced respondents from their early life right into adulthood. Second, we found **transition points**, or "aha!" moments, which had acted as triggering events for respondents to think about the idea of taking a literacy or upgrading program. Third, we found **intervening factors**, which include a wide range of socioeconomic-circumstantial influences that act as concrete barriers to nonparticipation, along with a host of cognitive-emotive influences that have to do with respondents' thoughts, perceptions, expectations, fears, and assumptions about learning and adult education programs.

These factors all interrelate and influence each other in complex ways that we do not yet fully understand at this early stage of research. But we do know that strategies aimed at increasing participation will have to address all of these factors, as well as their complex interrelationship.

In this concluding section, we consider the study's implications and make suggestions for outreach, policy and practice, and further research that can help us develop a deeper understanding of how to increase levels of participation.

Addressing diversionary factors

This study confirmed that regional and geographic factors, socioeconomic and cultural background, and other elements of respondents' life experience profoundly shaped their relationship with the formal education system and their reaction to the idea of returning to school.

Age is a particularly influential background characteristic. For example, take the case of youth between 16 and 24, who are in the critical school-to-work years. There is a clear need to understand the complex issue of early school leaving, both to prevent it and to create effective messages aimed at youth who have already left the formal education system.

This strategy should employ positive messages that encourage young people to stay in or return to school, without leaving the impression that those who drop out face a hopeless future. Although it is beyond the scope of this study, we know that many young people quickly develop a keen awareness of their life chances and opportunities, and that a negative assessment can lead to an ingrained hopelessness that is difficult to overcome later in life. Outreach strategies that let people know that it is never too late to learn might help to counteract this.

It is also vital to consider regional differences when conducting outreach. It was clear from many of the interviews that there is substantial regional variation in literacy needs and expectations. In order to reach nonparticipants across Canada, outreach strategies must address the differing cultures, work realities, and ways of life in different regions and between rural and urban areas of the country.

Given Canada's diverse cultural populations, it is vital to consider different cultural approaches to and experience with learning and education. While education is often viewed as liberating, Aboriginal respondents in the study spoke about cultural dislocation, discrimination, and abuse that they had experienced in the residential school and education systems. Clearly, after generations of residential schooling within the

Aboriginal community, the need for both healing and adult basic education programs is great. The findings of this study provide support for the ongoing development of culturally specific, Aboriginal educational programming.

From the information gathered during the interviews, we were unable to identify any of the respondents' cultural backgrounds, with the exception of Aboriginal respondents. The need to identify other cultural groups that would benefit from specific outreach strategies and culturally-specific education is an area for further research.

Addressing intervening factors

Most respondents in this study cited numerous occasions when they thought about the idea of returning to school—these "aha!" moments tended to centre around **transition points** like the birth of a child or the loss of a job. This study found two types of factors that intervened to prevent respondents from acting on these "aha!" moments.

Those working in the literacy field are well aware of the many **socioeconomic-circumstantial factors** that exist for people with low literacy levels. This study confirms that economic circumstances play a crucial role both in a person's decision to leave school early and in their difficulties in returning to school later in life. In addition, family responsibilities, childcare concerns, transportation difficulties, and health-related problems are all constraints which render participation impossible for many people.

It is clear that any strategy aimed at addressing nonparticipants will have to address these crucial, structural barriers. Initiatives such as workplace literacy and upgrading programs, enhanced income support programs, and funded childcare would go a long way to dismantling these barriers. However, until these things are in place, the multiple barriers faced by many of the respondents suggest the need for literacy and upgrading programs that are more closely integrated or work in partnership with other community services, such as employment counseling, childcare facilities, parenting centres, women's centres, health centres, homeless drop-ins, and community economic development initiatives.

Most of the respondents in this study had strong negative perceptions, thoughts and feelings about adult education programs and these **cognitive-emotive factors** clearly had a significant influence on the decision not to enrol. The concept of upgrading their literacy and numeracy skills was closely—and negatively—tied in respondents' minds with "going back to school." Since school was an overwhelmingly negative experience for most of the respondents, it is not surprising that the idea of returning to school evoked strong emotions. It is also not surprising that their perceptions of upgrading programs were largely based on past school experiences, especially because respondents had no current images with which to replace their bad memories.

Respondents reported many negative early school experiences, including:

☐ Harsh or impatient teachers, or a lack of attention from teachers.

☐ Indifferent or inflexible school bureaucracy.

☐ Curriculum that did not address their cultural, economic, or geographic context.

☐ Abuse (physical, sexual, or emotional) at the hands of teachers or others in the educational system.

☐ Discriminatory behaviour and lack of tolerance (from the system, teachers, classmates) for individual, class, or cultural differences.

Some of these problems might, in fact, present themselves if the respondents did return to school as adults. However, even if it could be ensured that these problems would never reoccur, the memory of these past experiences would still influence respondents' feelings about returning to learn. It is not surprising, then, that respondents' expectations of what to expect from an upgrading program were largely negative. Different respondents expressed different types of fears. These included:

☐ Feeling childlike and powerless (again).

☐ Being the only outsider in a regular classroom with much younger students.

☐ Having to sit still and concentrate in a traditional classroom setting.

☐ Having too many students in the class to get individual attention.

☐ Being unable to understand or answer questions when called upon.

☐ Being the slowest or dumbest in the class.

☐ Feeling different and alone among people with whom one can't identify (older/younger, smarter/dumber, different race or class), and "not fitting in".

☐ Other students being unfriendly, hostile, superior, "smarter", judgmental.

☐ The teacher being unfriendly, harsh, hostile, impatient, hard to understand, unwilling or incapable of explaining well, superior, judgmental, unfair, or even sexually inappropriate.

☐ Being ridiculed and embarrassed by teacher or classmates.

☐ The enrolment process being difficult, lengthy, and/or overly personal.

☐ The program or pace being inappropriate (too difficult/too basic, too fast/too slow).

☐ The program requiring too lengthy a commitment.

With fears like these, it is no wonder that nonparticipants avoid returning to school. In fact, their decision to remain nonparticipants may feel prudent, self-protective, and wise.

Any attempt to recruit nonparticipants to programs, therefore, must first address their stated fears. These fears raise some challenging questions about what actually does go on in adult education classrooms. In the current context, can we actually provide a safe, personalized, supportive, and empowering learning environment for all students? If our outreach strategies seek to dispel these fears as mere myths, can we deliver programs that won't drive new learners away? There is a danger that recruiting nonparticipants to programs that they consider to be impersonal or unsupportive will serve to reinforce their negative perceptions, and prevent them from ever seeking upgrading again.

Taking the next step

The 44 interviews that formed the basis for this report were the first part of a two-stage study on the topic of nonparticipation in literacy and upgrading programs. Stage Two involves interviewing 866 people (by phone) who have less than a high school diploma and who have never participated in a formal literacy or upgrading program. While the qualitative interview method gave us a tremendous depth of information about the experiences and perceptions of nonparticipants, the quantitative survey method reveals more about the scope of these experiences and perceptions and the degree to which they differ by province or territory, age, gender, urban or rural residence, and so forth.

The scale of Stage Two provides demographic and theoretical information that increases our ability to predict and, therefore, influence patterns of participation in educational programs by people with lower levels of formal education.

Stage Two also provides us with nationally-representative information about what percentage of potential learners are aware of literacy and upgrading programs and how to find them. In addition to gaining further knowledge of the socioeconomic or circumstantial obstacles some people face in attending adult basic education programs, Stage Two helps us develop a deeper understanding of people's core motivations and aspirations in relation to their current skill level so that we might better design outreach and programs. We are able to seek information about concepts regarding the types of program structure, content, times, and locations that potential learners would find most attractive.

The information we collected in Stage One suggests that it would be reasonable for StageTwo to focus on the following:

1. Quantifying the need/motivation

- ☐ The extent/strength of self-identification with transition points or aspirations which lead to thoughts of upgrading, (e.g., birth of child, loss of job, raising social status, encountering tasks one can't do);
- ☐ The extent to which respondents identify with a list of potential benefits to their lives of upgrading their reading, writing, or math skills. For example, the ability to:
  - ☐ complete daily living tasks like filling out forms, banking, etc.
  - ☐ take training in a field of interest;
  - ☐ get a better job or a promotion;
  - ☐ read to children or grandchildren;
  - ☐ help children or grandchildren with school work;
  - ☐ converse with other adults on a higher level;
  - ☐ feel more equal among friends, neighbours, fellow workers, etc.

2. Quantifying barriers

- ☐ Problems encountered in school and previous upgrading attempts, (e.g., not learning as quickly as others; being laughed at by other students; inability of teachers to explain well enough to understand; teachers lacking patience; etc.)
- ☐ The extent/strength of the various fears and negative expectations identified in Stage One.
- ☐ Socioeconomic-circumstantial factors

3. Quantifying potential solutions

- ☐ Awareness of current learning/upgrading options, and attitudes to these
- ☐ Awareness of other alternatives to learning options, including distance learning
- ☐ Access to computer/modem and experience with these
- ☐ Access to audio, video, and CD players
- ☐ Relative appeal of the various learning alternatives, both current and potential
- ☐ Interest in workplace programs
- ☐ Ability and willingness to travel outside of home
- ☐ Extent and flexibility of free time
- ☐ The appeal of various milestones for measuring progress
- ☐ The appeal of various types of incentives

APPENDIX A

INTERVIEW TEMPLATE

ABC CANADA 1999

Interviewer preamble

Before we start, I just want to say that although it seems kind of formal with a tape recorder and everything, I really hope that our time together will feel more like a regular conversation than like a formal interview. I do have some general questions, but as we go along please feel free to say whatever feels relevant to you; you don't even have to wait for me to ask questions. You know, try to think of it more like a regular conversation and say whatever feels natural at the time.

In general, we're trying to understand why some people sign up for programs and why others don't. We don't think that everyone necessarily should sign up for a program, but we want to understand why someone may decide to sign up or not. When you're talking, feel free to talk about your own individual experience, or about people you know, or just about your general opinion. There are no right and wrong answers. Everyone's experience is different and what you think and feel about the topic is really important to us.

I also want to say once again that you can stop the interview at any time and you can skip a question if you don't feel comfortable with it. We don't think that will be the case, but we just want to make sure that you feel comfortable from the very beginning. Everything you say is completely confidential. Your ideas and opinions are going to be put together with the ideas and opinions of a lot of other people that we're talking to across Canada and we won't be using anyone's name or using any other identifying information.

Do you have any questions before we begin?

[Start the tape recorder and double check that it is working.]

Section 1

Purpose: To explore how people frame and interpret their experience of never having signed up for a program to improve reading, writing or math.

Questions: *We know that some adults sign up for programs to improve reading, writing or math, and others don't. We know that people have a lot of different opinions and experiences and we'd like to know more about your particular experience. Is taking a program something that you ever think about doing yourself?*

(If no, and if needed, ask:) . Can you say more about that, for example, about what some of your thoughts are on the idea of taking a program?

Thinking back to different points in your life, for example, when you were a late teenager or a young adult or any other time since leaving school, have there ever been moments when you thought about maybe taking a program to improve, reading, writing, or math? Even if it was only a very brief thought? *(If yes, probe to get several examples of different moments in time where the idea surfaced)*

(If yes, and if needed, ask:) . What led you to decide against it at the time?

Section 2

Purpose: To explore people's perceptions of what programs would be like, and to understand more about the feelings and thoughts these perceptions evoke.

Important: *For each question in this section, please use the following standard format: Ask the question, then pause for a response. If the response is very short, probe by asking, Is there anything that you think you might be wondering about or concerned about? If the response is a bit longer, ask, Is there anything ELSE that you think you might be wondering about or concerned about? Then use the standard probes to ask for elaboration where needed.*

Script:. *(Put this first paragraph into your own words). The next part is a little bit different and may seem a bit unusual at first, but we've tried this with some other people and we've found it very helpful. The basic idea is that I want to ask you to pretend just for a moment that you have joined a program to improve reading, writing, or math. What I'm going to do is ask you a series of questions about that, about what you're thinking or feeling at different points. Some people find it really helpful to close their eyes as I'm talking, because they can concentrate better. It's your choice if you want to do that.*

Read verbatim, with affect, and remember to pause and probe after each question) . OK, just to set the scene, imagine yourself waking up on the first day of the new program. Picture yourself going through the steps of getting ready (pause) getting dressed (pause), eating (pause), walking out of your home (pause). Then picture yourself travelling to the place where the program is held. Before you get there, you realize you've forgotten to bring some paper and a pen, so you stop at a store to buy some. You look all through the stationery section and finally choose a three-ring binder, some lined paper, and a blue ballpoint pen. Now imagine that you are again travelling to where the program is held. Imagine yourself arriving at the building (pause) entering the building (pause), and then walking into the room where the program will be held. ***As you picture this, what do you think you might be feeling at that point?*** *(probe)*

Now, continuing with this line of thinking, when you walk into the room, you notice other people around. They'll be taking the program too. Let an image come to you of the other people. (pause) ***Can you tell me a bit about what you imagine the other people would be like?*** *(probe)* ***When you imagine the other people, do you think they would be similar to you or different from you? (probe) How old do you imagine them to be?*** *(probe)* ***Is there anything else you imagine about them?*** *(probe)*

Now, think about the teacher; let an image come to you. (pause) ***Tell me a bit about what you are seeing when you picture the teacher?*** *(probe)* ***How do you imagine the teacher might act in the class?*** *(probe)*

Now picture the room itself. ***What do you imagine the room might look like?*** *(probe)*

Imagine everyone taking their seats and the program starting. ***What types of things do you think would happen in a typical day in the program?*** *(probe)*

Section 3

Purpose: To explore the ways in which early school experiences influence people's ideas about programs.

Questions: *I want to talk a bit more about your early experiences with school as a child and teenager. Everyone's experience of school is quite different. Some people describe their early school experience as negative and others describe their experience as positive. Sometimes it's a mix of negative and positive.* ***Thinking back to when you were a child or a teenager, what was school like for you?***

(If negative, ask:). ***I'd like to ask you very directly if you think your early experience with school influences how you think about the idea of school in general. For example, do you think your earlier experiences might lead you to be somewhat hesitant to sign up for a program?***

(If yes, ask:). In what ways do you think these experiences might influence how you think about programs now?

Can you imagine anything that might help you feel differently about the idea of programs? *(Pause for response, then ask:)* ***I'm also wondering if there's anything about the programs themselves that you think should be different; is there anything that could change, which might make the idea of programs more interesting or appealing to you?)***

(If positive, ask:) . ***I'm wondering if there's anything about the programs themselves that you think should be different; is there anything that could change, which might make the idea of programs more interesting or appealing to you?)***

Section 4

Purpose: To explore the relationship between people's ideas about programs and their perception of life opportunities (educational, vocational, and social).

Questions: *Earlier on, we were talking a lot about programs for reading and writing: Now I'd like to ask you about other types of programs for adults. What I mean by that is programs where people can get certificates or diplomas or certain skills and credentials. Some people are interested in these types of programs and others aren't. Sometimes people are interested at one point in their lives but not at other points. Everyone has different experiences and we want to understand what your thoughts or experiences are with these other types of programs.* ***Have you ever at any point thought about maybe taking any type of educational or training program, even if it was just a very brief thought?*** *(probe for as many examples as possible; if examples don't come easily, ask the person to,)* ***Think back to when you were a teenager, a young adult, and now****. Then probe each example by saying,* ***What led you to decide against it at the time?*** *(Probe the response to this question)*

(For each of the above examples, ask). ***If those reasons had not been factors at the time, and the program that interested you required you to upgrade your reading, writing, or math before starting, do you think you would have done the upgrading at the time?*** *(You may need to reword this question, inserting the actual examples provided by the interview participant. For example, if money had not been a problem, and the mechanic's program had required..., do you think...?)*

(If no, and if needed, ask) . What would lead you to decide against it? (If yes, probe as usual.)

OK, I've asked all of my questions...

Conclusion

[Finish the interview by turning off the tape recorder and saying in your own words, how much we appreciate the person giving their time; that what he/she said has been extremely helpful, etc. Ask them to sign both waivers, pointing out that it is to give you permission to give the tape to ABC CANADA and it is also a guarantee that we will treat their information confidentially.

Remember to fill out the general information sheet on the bottom of the interviewer's copy of the waiver form.

Remember to give the person the honorarium in recognition of their time.]

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Nonparticipation in Literacy and Upgrading Programs

A National Study

Stage Two: Survey of Attitudes, Perceptions, and Preferences Regarding Adult Basic Education Programs

Doug Hart, Ellen Long, Helen Breslauer,
and Chris Slosser 2002

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HIGHLIGHTS

Introduction

Since the late 1980s, there has been a dramatic increase in the level and type of official attention paid to the issue of literacy rates among the adult population in Canada. Yet, despite increased funding, messages about the importance of increasing literacy skills, and high-profile outreach campaigns, only a small fraction - somewhere between 5 and 10 per cent - of eligible adults with low literacy skills ever enrols in literacy programs (Quigley 1997; White and Hoddinott 1998). Why, in the face of increasing public policy initiatives and highly visible outreach campaigns, are the majority of people with low literacy skills still reluctant to participate in literacy programs?

This is the second of two recent studies by ABC CANADA exploring issues of participation in adult basic education programs (The other is *Patterns of Participation*, Long and Middleton 2001). The overall purpose of the studies is to uncover factors that prevent those who might benefit from programs from making contact and enrolling.

Most studies in the literacy field have focused on participants. The present study surveys nonparticipants - those who have not taken a literacy or upgrading program or high school credit courses since leaving school without a diploma. Telephone surveys were conducted with a representative sample of 866 individuals across Canada. The central aim of the survey is to uncover ways of increasing appeal and improving Adult Basic Education (ABE) programming by investigating nonparticipants' awareness and perceptions of programs, and preferences and motivations for participating in them.

Main findings

Estimating the likelihood of enrolling: awareness, needs and motivations

- Close to 60 per cent of those interviewed had thought about the idea of taking upgrading or completing their high school diploma since leaving school early.
- Overall, about 60 per cent of interviewees indicated that they were aware of programs in their communities where people could improve their reading, writing and math skills. Differences in awareness by age, sex, and education (highest grade) are comparatively narrow. However younger interviewees (18-29), women, and those with higher levels of formal education (grades 11 and partial 13) tended to be more aware of programs than others.
- Membership in a high need group (measured as those who report that they are poor or moderate and have a need for assistance in one or more of reading, writing, and mathematics skills) was found to be the most important measure of self-perceived potential to benefit from an upgrading program.
- Although related to level of schooling, membership in a high need group is a better predictor of expecting to take an upgrading program or getting a high school diploma than level of schooling.
- Expectations of enrolling in an upgrading program or finishing a high school diploma are highest for those 18-24 years of age and drop off at about age 50.
- Those with high need are more likely to expect to enrol in a program to upgrade or complete their high school diploma.
- Being high need has its greatest impact on attitudes to upgrading among the young, those under 30.
- No matter how they assessed their own skills, interviewees were more likely to expect to take an upgrading program the higher their level of schooling.
- Controlling for age,(i.e., by excluding those 50 and older), the relationship between needs and expectations changes in that level of schooling no longer plays a central role.
- Interest in postsecondary education is a strong motivator in considering a program to improve basic skills.
- "Persisters," those who had thought about taking an upgrading program or completing their high school diploma since leaving

school and expect to take one in the next five years, tend to be younger than "Discontinuers," those who thought about it but don't expect to do it in future.

- ☐ Work-related reasons were most frequently cited as reasons for thinking about taking a program, especially among the young.
- ☐ Educational reasons for taking a program increase with age.
- ☐ Persisters and Discontinuers gave the same reasons for considering a program.
- ☐ Membership in a high need group is a poor predictor of having considered taking an upgrading program, but a much better predictor of whether that interest is sustained once having considered a program.
- ☐ If high need encourages a persistent, active interest in upgrading, this is even more the case where there is a specific objective in mind. Over 80 per cent of those who had considered taking a postsecondary program and think they would need upgrading to do so, are Persisters.

Diversionary and intervening factors associated with nonparticipation

- ☐ For those who have considered taking a program to upgrade or complete their high school diploma, the reasons for not enrolling in one are similar for those with high needs and those without high needs. They tend to be work-related most often, and socioeconomic/circumstantial factors account for more than half the responses.
- ☐ For those who have not considered taking a program, being high need makes a big difference. Their reasons tend to socioeconomic/circumstantial (SEC) as well, but they are more likely to report lack of interest as the main reason. For those in this group who are not high need, over 40 per cent cite lack of interest as the main reason and SEC factors much less.
- ☐ Work and family account for more than half the reasons given by 18-29 year olds and those over 65. Thirty to 49 year olds cite these reasons over 40 per cent of the time and 50-64 year olds just under 40 per cent. Eighteen to 29 year olds cite lack of interest least (14 per cent) and 50-64 year olds most (33 per cent).
- ☐ Among females who considered taking a program, family reasons are cited almost a third of the time for not taking it, followed by work-related and work and family reasons by more than another

third. Among males, in contrast, work-related reasons and lack of interest account for more than 60 per cent of responses.

☐ Among females who have not considered taking a program, about half cite work and family reasons for not enrolling, and another quarter report lack of interest. Among comparable males, a quarter cite work reasons and more than half lack of interest.

☐ There are no substantial differences in the reasons given by Persisters and Discontinuers for not enrolling although a higher proportion of Discontinuers cite lack of interest.

☐ For those planning to take a program in the next five years and for Discontinuers, there is a consistent hierarchy of concerns about taking a program: socioeconomic/circumstantial (SEC) and program/policy related (PPR) concerns generally have higher median ratings than cognitive-emotive (CE) concerns.

☐ The two most highly ranked concerns are general concerns about money and conflict with paid employment, followed by distance of program offered.

☐ The next most highly ranked set of concerns are PPR including program length, level of difficulty, not being able to work at one's own pace and relevance of program content.

☐ The highest CE factor is a general nervousness about taking a program.

☐ Discontinuers differ from those planning to take a program in the next five years. Discontinuers are not concerned about childcare, but are concerned it might be too late for them to learn. Those who plan to take a program view childcare as very important and are not concerned it might be too late to learn.

☐ Younger interviewees' (under 30) leading concern is childcare, which is of little interest to older groups. Those under 50 are very concerned about conflict with jobs; those over 50 are not.

☐ Women are very like men when it comes to motivation for taking programs. They are as likely as men to have considered taking upgrading, thought about postsecondary education, expect to take an upgrading program within five years. They differ in the types of factors influencing their decisions.

☐ Both women and men cite SEC and PPR concerns. Women are somewhat more concerned about money problems and cite CE concerns more often than men.

☐ Female single parents are more than twice as likely as male parents in households with partners to think they might take an upgrading program or complete a high school diploma in the next five years.

- Female single parents cite money concerns more than any other male or female group with children in the household. They are also most concerned about the distance of the program.
- Female parents, whether single or not, indicate more concern about childcare than do male parents, single or not.

Levels of comfort with program formats and locations

Program formats

- Persisters, and others who stated they might take a program in the next five years, show strong interest in 5 of 8 formats, but two stand out: studying one-on-one with a tutor; and small group sessions of 5-10 students.
- Just under a third of Persisters are extremely interested in using the Internet to take an upgrading program; an almost equal number (28 per cent) are not at all interested.
- Discontinuers show less enthusiasm across the board for all formats, are more interested in studying in a small group of 5-10 students than in any one-on-one arrangement, and are much less interested in the Internet and other forms of distance education.

Program locations

- Among Persisters and others expecting to take a program, a classroom in a local school, college or university is the preferred venue. There is no one clearly defined location for Discontinuers.
- Both Persisters and others who expect to take a program in the next five years and Discontinuers show a strong dislike for holding upgrading programs in public settings such as coffee shops, restaurants and pubs.
- About a third of both groups were also uncomfortable with their workplaces and local churches as a program location.

Discussion and conclusions

- ☐ Strategies for dealing with socioeconomic/circumstantial factors associated with nonparticipation in upgrading or high school completion include:
    - ☐ outreach to employers and unions to encourage their assistance in facilitating employee and member upgrading to help improve work-related conflicts;
    - ☐ attempts to find solutions to family responsibilities that include provision of childcare and eldercare and the potential for participation by families;
    - ☐ providing ways to ease financial problems through the provision of income replacement programs and the offsetting of expenses.
- ☐ Strategies for dealing with cognitive-emotive concerns by acknowledging the nervousness and anxiety felt by adult learners, suggesting ways to reassure them, and emphasizing success.
- ☐ Strategies for dealing with program/policy-related concerns include using outreach to dispel myths and explain exactly what classes, learning groups or tutoring are like, who the learners and teachers are, and what kinds of materials are used.
- ☐ It is important to recognize the clear message about program formats and locations by ensuring the provision of one-on-one learning and learning in small 5-10 person groups in classrooms in educational institutions.

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Since the late 1980s, there has been a dramatic increase in the level and type of official attention paid to the issue of literacy rates among the adult population in Canada. In 1987, for example, the federal government established the National Literacy Secretariat (NLS), which is responsible for funding numerous literacy initiatives throughout the country. From the mid-1990s, Canada has engaged, along with many other industrialized nations, in ongoing measurements of adult literacy rates through the *International Adult Literacy Survey* (IALS).[1] And since 1995, Canada has benefited from a high profile, private sector awareness campaign created by ABC CANADA, called *LEARN*, aimed at encouraging adults to return to school to upgrade their basic education. This massive, multi-media campaign has helped develop a networked infrastructure of literacy referral organizations that are increasingly visible to the public.

Despite increased funding, messages about the importance of increasing literacy skills, and high-profile outreach campaigns, only a small fraction - somewhere between five and ten per cent - of eligible adults with low literacy skills ever enrols in literacy programs (Quigley 1997; White and Hoddinott 1998).

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[1] According to the IALS, 38 per cent of Canadians have difficulty with everyday reading and writing tasks. The IALS positions literacy as a "policy sensitive issue" that should be addressed more aggressively by government policy across numerous jurisdictions. (Statistics Canada 1996)

Recruitment and retention are among the most serious challenges facing the literacy field. The gap between the official goal and the practical reality is nothing short of startling and presents a pressing question: Why, in the face of increasing public policy initiatives and highly visible outreach campaigns, are the majority of people with low literacy skills still reluctant to participate in literacy programs?

Casting a wide net

Stage Two: Survey of Attitudes, Perceptions and Preferences, Regarding Adult Basic Education Programs is the second stage of ABC CANADA's national study of nonparticipation.

In Stage One, we interviewed a small number of people who were part of the social circles of those who were enrolled in programs, but who had not themselves enrolled. We asked learners in literacy or upgrading programs to identify others who they thought might benefit from this kind of program. These had to be people who did not have a high school diploma and who had never contacted a program. The learner had to be willing to ask the person if they would talk to our interviewer. In this way we located 44 people, across the country, for interviews.

In Stage Two, we interviewed, by phone, a sample of 866 respondents without high school diplomas, who had never contacted a program. It is likely, given current levels of program participation, that few respondents in our sample know people in literacy or upgrading programs. This large group was located by calling a random sample of telephone numbers. In other words, respondents entered our sample by chance, not on anyone's recommendation.

The 44 people in Stage One were a special group of nonparticipants in literacy and upgrading programs. They already knew someone in a program and that person thought that the interviewee they helped recruit could benefit from a program. There is a high chance that the people we interviewed were like the learners who recruited them in important ways (e.g., income level or ethnic group) and part of their social circles. In contrast, the much larger number of respondents in Stage Two was selected at random. Because of this, our sample, within a margin of error, represents all Canadians who do not have a high school diploma and have not contacted a literacy or upgrading program, rather than any special group of nonparticipants

Identifying factors associated with nonparticipation at different stages

The overall purpose of this study of nonparticipation is to uncover factors that prevent those who might benefit from programs from making contact and enrolling. The results of Stage One and Stage Two of this study combine to provide a more complete picture of the factors influencing participation in programs than we have had up to now.

On the surface, Stage One and Stage Two appear to present some differences in what prevents people from enrolling in literacy or upgrading programs. The differences primarily centre on the respective roles of perceptual, structural, and program/policy-related factors. Whereas Stage One shows the strength of perceptual factors (e.g., fear of embarrassment, assumptions that adult education will be similar to childhood education) in deterring people from program participation, Stage Two reveals more structural factors (e.g., socioeconomic barriers, time related factors). This does not mean that the two stages are telling conflicting stories. Indeed, what we are seeing are some legitimate pieces in a complex puzzle. It also means we need always to keep in mind whose views are being expressed through each stage. While a comparison of the methodologies of Stages One and Two appears to account for some of the thematic differences in the two stages; the varying demographic compositions of the two samples did give rise to some real differences. For example, fear and nervousness about school is more pronounced among those with lower levels of education; therefore, Stage One found higher degrees of fear and nervousness than did Stage Two, whose sample contained more people with higher levels of formal education.

Historically the literacy field has tended to base its understanding of nonparticipants on the experiences of those who have enrolled in programs. Those who eventually enrolled in programs are asked about what prevented them from doing so earlier. It is unlikely that this select group is representative of all nonparticipants. All they can really tell us, for certain, is about the experiences of nonparticipants who finally became learners in programs. Those who contacted programs and who enrolled (or not) cannot be taken as representative of all nonparticipants, most of whom have never picked up the telephone to call an agency.

By comparing studies of participants or nonparticipants, we can identify important similarities but also important differences across these groups. For example, in two recent studies (*It guided me back to learning*, Middleton 1999; and *Patterns of Participation* Long and Middleton 2001) found that the most frequent reasons why people did not enrol in the programs they contacted had to do with a variety of program/policy-related factors. (This covered a range of responses, from problems finding the right type or level of program to complaints about not being called back or being put on a long waiting list). Program/policy-related factors are the third critical piece, along with perceptual and structural factors, accounting for why more people do not participate in programs to upgrade reading writing and math.

For a fuller discussion of these factors, we turn now to a review of the literature on nonparticipation.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

Factors affecting nonparticipation

Researchers studying adult education have provided a number of theoretical maps useful in guiding responses to the question: *Why, in the face of increasing public policy initiatives and highly visible outreach campaigns, are the majority of people with low literacy skills still reluctant to participate in literacy programs?* The following section provides a brief overview of a sampling of these maps, highlighting the myriad of individual, socioeconomic, cultural, and institutional factors that may act to encourage or discourage participation.

Researchers have turned to theories of human development to provide insight into the particular life issues of different age groups that affect their motivations to participate in adult education programs. Psychosocial or phase theories, for example, seek to understand the common tasks that people confront as they face the problems associated with aging (Dolaz 1999). As people move through the different phases of the life cycle, they are confronted with different challenges or barriers and face new opportunities that affect and alter their self-image and self-interests. As this development occurs people come to realize that each experience, challenge and opportunity has a particular context, meaning and connection defining the individual's and society's reality. This reality frames individuals' understanding of social and economic contexts that shape their ability to make, and later remake, commitments to values, work and communities. People's resultant perceptions of reality, then, bound their power to affect change in their own lives. A variety of motivations result that shapes people's interest in and awareness of perceptions, preferences, and expectations of adult education programs.

Related to this is "stage theory" (Dolaz 1999). Stage theory posits that as people develop, they pass through distinct and qualitatively different stages of childhood and adulthood. People first move from a "preconventional" stance, in which their own personal survival is paramount, to a "conventional" orientation, in which their main concern is to fit into and be accepted by society. Later, the theory argues, people move to a "postconventional" position, in which decisions are derived from broader considerations than personal survival or a wish to conform. This theory, then, highlights the importance of personal agency as it asserts that human development involves more than becoming a well-adjusted member of society. It also means evaluating one's culture from a critical perspective and discovering relationships and employing available resources that affect one's desired place within that culture (Dolaz 1999).

As Dirkx (1999) discusses, researchers have used these theories to develop conceptual frameworks or models that might help predict and explain patterns of participation in adult education programs. Houle (1961), for example, developed the concept of "motivational orientation" by considering concepts outlined above. He identified three major forms of orientation to participation: goal-oriented; activity-oriented; and learning-oriented (Dirkx 1999). Goal-oriented adults use education as a means to achieve some other kind of goal. Activity-oriented adults participate in education for the sake of the activity itself and for its social interaction. Learning-oriented adults enrol in education for the sake of acquiring knowledge.

Boshier (1971) developed Houle's model into a 48 item Education Participation Scale (EPS) ranking motivations for participation. Using this EPS in empirical studies of participants in adult education programs, Morstain and Smart (1974) distilled six motivations for participation in adult education programs: social relationships (meet new friends); external expectations (complying with the directives of those in authority); social welfare (wanting to serve others or the community); professional or job advancement; escape or stimulation (alleviating boredom or escaping home or work routines); and cognitive interest (engaged for the sake of learning itself) (Dirkx 1999). Boshier developed a similar seven-factor typology in 1991 based on a study of students in university programs, that included the following motivations: communication improvement, social contact, educational preparation, professional advancement, family togetherness, social stimulation and cognitive interest (Merrian and Caffarella 1999).

Other researchers studying participation in adult education programs have focused on individuals who have dropped out, or left school early, to gain insight into factors affecting participation (or nonparticipation) in formal education programs. As Tinto (1987) shows, studies of dropout rates in high schools typically reveal that the school environment is a strong determinant of academic participation and success. It is argued that "differences in school performance are a function of the ethos pervading the daily life of the schools, which informs the actions of both students and teachers. Ineffective schools are often those whose faculty and staff hold little expectation for the success of their students" (Tinto 1987: 90). The behavioural and normative characteristics of the institution, then, has as much to do - if not more - with the failure of students as do the students themselves (Tinto 1987).

In a study of dropout rates in American high schools, Rumberger (1995) found that in addition to institutional factors, dropout rates can be attributed to socioeconomic status of individuals and their families (early school leavers are more likely to come from families with lower economic status), a factor most recognizable when different ethnic groups are compared. While the strength of this relationship is debated, Marks and Fleming (1999) found there is at least some correlation: early school leavers in Australia were more likely to come from families with lower socioeconomic status and less education.

According to Rumberger, most studies of early school leavers in the United States show that African-, Hispanic-, and Aboriginal-Americans have higher dropout rates than Anglo- and Asian-Americans. The most common explanation of this has been that minority groups come from more disadvantaged families, but this explanation does not explain why some minority groups, with different levels of socioeconomic background, succeed while other groups do not. Many researchers argue that those minority groups most willing to accept the dominant culture have lower attrition rates (Rumberger 1995).

Rumberger also found that parental education is a powerful predictor of school achievement and student dropout behaviour. Similarly, parental involvement in schooling - from reading at home to attending school functions - affects dropout rates. Research reveals that parental involvement varies with ethnicity, social class, and family structure and thus may help explain differential achievement levels among such families.

Parental practices or parenting style also affects dropout rates (Rumberger 1995). Students develop psychosocial maturity and do better in school when they come from families in which parents monitor and regulate their activities while providing emotional support and encouraging independent decision-making. Again, these styles have been shown to vary with ethnicity, socioeconomic status and family structure.[1] Similarly, Rumberger found that neighbourhoods, communities and peers - and the attitude of each toward the value of education - affect student achievement and dropout rates.

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1. As Rumberger (1995) notes, not enough research has been done to establish clear links between these processes and dropout rates, but there appears to be at least some correlation.

Moving towards an understanding of participation in adult basic education

In considering the outlined range of individual, social/cultural and institutional influences on learner motivations to participate in adult education programs, researchers studying adult basic education have come to explain nonparticipation in one of two ways: structural theorists argue that social, cultural and economic barriers, or problems located within delivery institutions, are responsible for nonparticipation (Quigley 1990); agency and attitudinal theorists consider the ways in which people direct their own lives based on their psychological motivations, perceptions and attitudes and how these affect participation.

Structural theories

Generally, there are two types of structural factors referred to by theorists: global and practical. Global structural barriers refer to the effect of social, economic, and political factors on people with low literacy skills. Research by Fagan (1988) suggests that people with low literacy skills are keenly aware of the social, economic, and political forces besides literacy that shape their lives. To many, the benefits of improving literacy skills may seem inconsequential in relation to these other factors. Similarly, Ogbu (1982) and Malicky and Norman (1994) suggest that many ABE participants are educationally hindered by a sense of hopelessness due to a perceived lack of labour market opportunities.

Darkenwald and Merriam's psychosocial interaction model emphasizes the effects of socioeconomic status on an individual during preadulthood and adulthood. Darkenwald and Merriam argue that during preadulthood, individual and family characteristics, especially intelligence and socioeconomic status, determine the type of education and socialization a person experiences. These experiences have a direct effect on the adult's socioeconomic status, which in turn affects the individual's need to participate in adult education programs, while defining the cultural attitudes and social value placed on further educational achievement. The result is a web of social pressures affecting individual participation (Merriam and Caffarella 1999).

Harry Miller's force field analysis argues that participation is related to Maslow's hierarchy of needs: adults from lower income groups, who possess a greater need than those from higher income groups for skills that will increase their socioeconomic status, participate in adult education programs for job-related and basic skills reasons, whereas participants from higher income groups seek education to satisfy achievement and self-realization needs. Miller argues that this tendency can also be related to life-cycle; younger people are more interested than older people in achieving economic security, for example (Merriam and Caffarella 1999).

Similarly, other needs hierarchy theorists argue that participation reflects an individual's ability to meet a range of primary and secondary needs, and the positive and negative forces influencing his/her life. As socioeconomic status improves and basic primary needs are met, higher level needs are activated to necessitate increasing literacy skills, and the ratio of negative to positive forces declines. This produces a situation conducive to engagement in educational or other activities (McGivney 1990).

Others argue that participation should be explained with greater reference to social participation in general; educational participation is bound with factors such as occupational status and income that define an individual's standing in the community (Courtney 1981). While variables such as age, sex, marital status, and place of residence play a role, participation is related to the "perceptions of power and self-worth mediated through the instrumentality of those variables" (Courtney 1981: 104-5). Moreover, general social participation refers to the extent to which a person is an active participant in family and community life. Researchers have argued that participating in adult education should be considered just one component of social participation (Merriam and Caffarella 1999: 58). And asw

Benn (1997) argues, the extent of one's general social activity affects learning activity; social networks, groups and cultural organizations to which one belongs can significantly affect an individual's motivations to participate (Milton 1999).

In a study of Norwegian adult education, Nordhaug (1990) examines the effect on participation rates of regional material resources and population densities in relation to the structure of municipalities. Sissel (1997) studies the effect specific structural factors (i.e., ethnicity and gender) have on power relations and allocation of programmatic resources in American adult education. Finally, Jarvis (1985) argues that participation rates are affected by a middle-class bias found in programs organized by the middle class, which present information using language and content aimed at the middle class.

Practical structural factors that have been identified include little or no income support to attend programs (Middleton 1999), inconvenient geographical location of classes (Leis 1994), insufficient childcare options (White and Hoddinott 1998), inconvenient class times (Beder 1990), and competing demands for time.

Agency and attitudinal theories

Some researchers (Fingeret, 1983; Quigley, 1990, 1992) fault structural theories for viewing adult learners through a "deficit perspective" which constructs them as powerless and without agency. They argue that to see nonparticipation strictly as a structural issue is to "effectively diminish a perceived capacity for human agency among nonparticipants... [and to]... reinforce stereotypes of illiterate adults as fearful, suspicious victims of socioeconomic circumstances who are incapable of utilizing the educational opportunities extended them" (Quigley 1990: 104-5). Others suggest that "resistance to [formal education] must be viewed from a theoretical starting point that links the display of behavior to the interest it embodies, going beyond the immediacy of behavior to the interest that underlies its often hidden logic" (Giroux 1983: 282). In this light, nonparticipation is not considered a resultant condition thrust upon individuals by various circumstances, but is an active choice to reject certain forms of education. This theory, called resistance theory, redefines the meaning of oppositional behaviour from "deviance and learned helplessness [to] moral and political indignation" (Giroux 1983: 289).

In ground breaking studies of nonparticipants in an inner-city housing project in Pittsburgh, Quigley (1990, 1992) found that nonparticipants do not reject learning or education, they reject school and schooling. He found three types of "resisters" in his interviews: the personal/emotive resisters who spoke of teacher insensitivity and alienation from peers; the age-related resisters - those over the age of 50 who do not see schooling as relevant to their daily lives; and the ideological/cultural resisters who spoke at a macro or systemic level. This latter group felt at cultural or class odds with teachers, other students, and the intentions of the school (e.g., to prepare them for certain jobs).

Another agency-related theory argues that participants believe they are capable of learning and value the outcomes of learning that they see as relevant to their personal needs. Motivation is a result of an interaction of "expectancy" and "valence". Expectancy refers to the expected successes in and positive consequences from learning. Valence refers to the total sum of positive or negative values an individual assigns to learning activities. Both expectancy and valence are results of an individual's previous experiences, social environment and personal needs (McGivney 1990).

Similarly, Boshier's congruency model asserts "that 'congruence' both within the participant and between the participant and his [or her] educational environment determine participation/nonparticipation and dropout/persistence" (Merriam and Caffarella 1999: 62). This model is based on assumptions that participation is determined by how people feel about themselves and the match between the self and the educational environment. Individual and social characteristics such as gender, age and social class, and environmental factors such as access to transportation, program availability, and educational class size will affect people's perceptions of self and environment, and thus their desire to participate (Merriam and Caffarella 1999).

Henry and Basile's decision model considers the demographic, socioeconomic and institutional characteristics (i.e., school reputation, availability of programs, course attributes, etc.) as factors in determining a person's decision to participate. For this theory, it is the weighing of such factors that is central, thus placing the individual and individual choice at the centre of participation (Merriam and Caffarella 1999).

Incorporating aspects of other theories, Cross's chain-of-response model starts with an individual's self-evaluation, in other words, one's assessment as to whether academic achievement is possible. This evaluation combines with individual attitudes about education and the importance and expectation of individual goals. Cross's model then considers these factors in light of life transitions, or the events and circumstances that affect individual motivation as one passes through the life cycle. Finally, environmental factors (i.e., institutional factors, social attitudes about education) are considered (Merriam and Caffarella 1999). Although this model does have environmental components, according to Merriam and Caffarella (1999: 68) "it is primarily a psychological model with its focus on the individual progressing through the chain of response", attempting to provide an understanding of *individual* attitudes toward self and education.

Just as structural theorists have been criticized for over-emphasizing the role of the structural environment in affecting participation, agency-related theorists have been accused of favouring the role of agency in a way that could lead to blaming the victim (Giroux 1983). By interpreting actions of nonparticipants as choices, theorists run the risk of romanticizing decisions made in the context of compelling structural forces. For the literacy field to begin focusing on resistance explanations without linking them back to structural factors would be highly problematic.

Furthermore, resistance theory allows that almost any oppositional behaviour can be seen as resistance (Giroux 1983; McClaren, 1985). Disregarding the wide range of individuals' primary cultural contexts could lead us away from considering key factors affecting the ability of adults to participate in programs. Ogbu's (1982) work on the effects of institutionalized racism illustrates how structural factors influence the perceptions, beliefs, and actions of the people affected. Similarly, work focused on gender differences would be able to explore the influence of family responsibilities on the educational choices of women with low literacy skills.

Though largely anecdotal, research on the effects of individual attitudes serves to illuminate factors affecting participation. In a study of nonparticipants in Iowa, Beder (1990) found four basic reasons for not attending ABE programs: low perception of need (e.g., "Schooling won't improve my life"), perceived difficulty (e.g., "I'm not smart enough to go back to school"), dislike for school, and situational factors (e.g., time constraints, family and work commitments). Moreover, Beder found that these attitudes were likely to vary widely according to age and stage of life cycle. The most salient result from Beder's study, then, is to show that nonparticipants are not a homogeneous group; their diversity requires tailored recruitment and instruction to specific subgroup needs, wants, and perceptions (Beder 1990).

These findings are reflected in those of Aslanian and Bricknell (1980), who posit a life transitions theory, arguing that the decision to participate in ABE programs coincides with changes in life circumstances. Aslanian and Bricknell found that 80 per cent of an American sample were learning because their lives were changing in some way. Similarly, British studies have found that the proportion of participants in organized education who have experienced a life change, i.e., divorce or bereavement, is high in relation to their numbers in the general population (McGivney 1990).

Erickson (1987) found that people who do poorly in their early schooling often experience a breach of trust at a deep existential level, affecting the very foundation of school legitimacy. These breaches will have invariably been experienced through mediating influences of class, culture, race, gender, or other cultural and identity factors. This finding corresponds with Thomas' (1990) study of nonparticipants in Vancouver, which reveals that a negative attitude toward school, and the concept of school itself, was the most salient factor in nonparticipation; nonparticipants felt that they just did not belong in school. And as discussed above, the congruence theory of participation argues that participation results when an individual's attitudes or views of him/herself are congruent with the nature of the education program and the educational environment (McGivney 1990).

Others argue that participation reflects attitudes generated in reference to the individual's social group. This theory, called reference group theory, suggests that individuals identify with the social and cultural group to which they belong – termed the 'normative' reference group (NRG) – or to which they aspire to belong – the 'comparative' reference group (CRG). Habitual participants usually belong to an NRG that is positively oriented to education. They are likely to have had parents, relations, neighbours or friends who have taken part in learning or who have positive attitudes to education (McGivney 1990). Others participate in order to achieve perceived advantages of a group to which they do not belong. A CRG presents a contrast to an individual's personal situation, creating a "sense of relative deprivation" (Gooderham 1987). Individuals use the attitudes, values and standards of a comparative reference group to evaluate or change their own socioeconomic situation (Gooderham 1987).

This theory argues that factors surrounding an adult's *current* social situation are likely a more decisive determinant of participation than comparable elements located in pre-adult years. Anderson and Darkenwald (1979), for example, argue that factors such as gender, ethnicity, and initial schooling account for only about 10 per cent of variance between participants and non-participants. They suggest that participation needs to be explained according to personal or situational variables.

A central flaw of the research on attitudes is that, like the work on agency, it is not sufficiently linked to structural factors. Much attitudinal research can result in "blaming the victim" by seeing attitudes as causal rather than problematizing them as symptomatic and investigating their roots.

As the preceding discussion indicates, many detailed, enlightening variations of the structural and agency/attitudinal perspectives have arisen. Yet, much of the literature on nonparticipation tends to favour one type of explanation over the other. The consequences of this are serious. To focus on structure alone is to see people as passive victims with little ability to think about or influence the direction of their lives. To focus on agency alone is either to romanticize people's behaviour or to blame them by not considering the context in which their attitudes are formed and decisions are made. What is missing in the literature on nonparticipation is an understanding of the complex interplay between personal and structural factors. As a result, research that is meaningful or ground breaking in its individual findings can present only part of the whole picture, rather than reliably integrating theoretical models of nonparticipation.

The result is a scattering of methodologies only partially capable of describing and predicting nonparticipation. Required is an approach able to consider the entire range of structural, agency and attitudinal factors such that policy and program providers have the ability to anticipate the needs of nonparticipants and develop instruments with their input.

Bridging the structure-agency/attitudinal gap

Long and Middleton (2001) have developed a typology of three categories that considers the range of factors affecting participation across the theoretical divide outlined above. The first category, called **socioeconomic/circumstantial (SEC) factors**, considers the factors affecting an individual's ability to meet various fundamental needs (i.e., socioeconomic status). As Hoddinott (1998: 103, as quoted in Long and Middleton 2001: 21) has shown, "something as basic and as inexpensive as a bus pass can make the difference between a person's attending a program or not." The expenses associated with living in isolated areas may also pose barriers for people. Circumstantial factors relate to individual life situations, for example hours of work or chronic health problems that make participation difficult.

The second category defined by Long and Middleton is called **cognitive-emotive (CE) factors**. This category refers to the "broad range of psychological orientations, attitudes, expectations and perceptions of adults with low literacy skills - often reported in terms of low self-confidence and fear of failure" (Long and Middleton 2001: 22). Included in this category is the possible effect on an individual's decision to participate of perceived stigma resulting from having to disclose one's literacy skills. This category also encompasses factors resulting in individual attitudes of resistance to formal education, as discussed by agency theories outlined above.

Preferences may also be included in the cognitive-emotive category. While there is little existing literature on program preferences of nonparticipants, we can gain some understanding of the issue by considering their motivations. As Long and Middleton (2001) write, the most extensive study of motivations was conducted by Beder and Valentine (1990). Working with a sample of participants in Iowa, Beder and Valentine developed a typology of ten dimensions of motivation. "The range of motivations included extrinsic benefits, such as vocational mobility and economic need, and intrinsic benefits, such as enhanced participation in community life and increased ability to meet family responsibilities and negotiate life transitions" (Long and Middleton 2001: 20).

The diversity and multidimensional aspects of this typology indicates that ABE students are motivated by a variety of intrinsic and extrinsic goals, that they consider both the ends and the means of education, and that their decision to participate results from a combination of many factors unique to each individual.

Beder (1991) has further shown that motivations to participate vary with circumstances and cycles of life. Older students, for example, may not appear to have overt needs to participate, but they may have latent needs related to the changing circumstances associated with aging. Paul (1997), for example, has shown that seniors may be motivated by personal and social goals including the desire to stimulate the mind, improve or maintain memory, be with others, and learn new things.

This diversity of motivations, and the associated program preferences necessary to meet these goals, suggests that programs need "to identify and respond to the communal needs of groups of learners within specific practice and community contexts, and to consider the multifaceted nature of motivation within each individual" (Long and Middleton 2001: 21).

The final category, **program/policy-related (PPR) factors**, considers the visibility, availability, accessibility, and effectiveness of programs. As Long and Middleton (2001) point out, many adults do not participate because there are no programs offered, or the programs may be taught at an inappropriate skill level, or held at awkward, inflexible times, or because they are not aware of them. In her study of nonparticipation in Britain, McGivney (1990) states that a primary reason for low participation rates in ABE programs relates to the public's knowledge of available educational opportunities. At the time of that study, it was estimated that up to two-thirds of nonparticipants simply did not know what learning opportunities exist (McGivney 1990: 16). It was argued that this lack of awareness resulted from varying involvement in community life: those less involved in communal activities were less knowledgeable about learning opportunities.

However, thanks to massive awareness and research campaigns, such as the *International Adult Literacy Survey* (IALS) mentioned earlier, public awareness of literacy programs has risen dramatically throughout North America and Europe over the past decade. As Hoddinott (1998) argues, it has been demonstrated repeatedly in recent years that when the public is made aware of available educational assistance the response is overwhelming. She cites examples of a British public awareness campaign that resulted in responses to a telephone referral service increasing from 5,000 to well over 100,000 in a period of two years, and of an American campaign that produced 35,000 new calls to a referral service in just two weeks.

As mentioned earlier, there has been a dramatic increase in the level and type of national attention paid to literacy in Canada since the late 1980s. The establishment of the National Literacy Secretariat, Canada's participation in the IALS, ABC CANADA's *LEARN* campaign, and the outreach work of many community-based groups have substantially raised awareness of literacy programs in Canada

According to Long (1996), the *LEARN* campaign was the most common way that Canadian learners found out about literacy organizations and programs: more than 50 per cent of calls from learners were associated with the *LEARN* campaign.[2] As Quigley (1992: 106) writes in a study of nonparticipation, "With nearly a decade of literacy media campaigning behind us, it becomes increasingly difficult to argue that [low-literate]

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[2] While Long's report highlights the unequivocal success of the LEARN campaign in raising awareness of literacy programs in Canada, it also draws the sobering conclusion that funding and resource issues plagued, at that time, 70 per cent of the organizations in the report in a way that impairs or endangers their services (Long 1996: 8). Similarly, Hoddinott (1998) shows that access, rather than awareness, is the more pressing concern for literacy practitioners; unavailability of programs remains one of the primary reasons driving non enrolment of those individuals who do make initial contact with literacy agencies (Long 2000: 10).

adults have somehow never heard of literacy opportunities or are too unmotivated to take advantage of them."[3]

Taking the next step

Why, then, do only five to ten per cent of eligible adults with low literacy skills ever enrol in literacy programs? As the preceding discussion shows, a complex combination of structural and agency/attitudinal factors are likely to shape the individual perceptions that influence participation.

This section has reviewed the complex array of factors affecting nonparticipation while suggesting the challenges facing program providers. While all of these approaches provide invaluable insight to the understanding of nonparticipation, the majority have surveyed individuals who have dropped out of, or who are currently enrolled in, literacy programs, asking them to reflect back upon their previous nonparticipation. The studies involving nonparticipants are comparatively few in the literacy field. Thus, many questions remain unanswered.

The present report is an attempt to fill some of this void. Telephone surveys were conducted with 866 individuals across Canada who have less than high school completion and have never taken a literacy/ upgrading program or attempted to complete their high school diploma.The central aim of this survey is to uncover ways of increasing appeal and improving ABE programming by investigating nonparticipants' awareness and perceptions of, and preferences and motivations for, joining ABE programs. The results should have significant bearing on future policy and program design.

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3. Nevertheless, the survey conducted for Stage One of this report did reveal that some people did not seek out programs at earlier stages of their lives because they were unaware of programs or where to find them.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY AND SAMPLE

Sampling and instrument finalization

The initial survey objective was to complete a total of 1000 interviews with individuals from across Canada between the ages of 18 to 69 who had not finished their secondary education. Interviews were conducted in both French and English.

The survey sample was derived from two primary sources. The bulk of the sample was developed from an exhaustive database of all telephone directories published in Canada. This sample was further supplemented by an EKOS database of randomly generated telephone numbers, which were created by using the last two digits of actual listed numbers in order to access unlisted telephone numbers. The second source for the survey sample was EKOS' extensive database of people who had previously completed an EKOS survey. This sample was scanned to provide a workable sub-sample of individuals who most closely matched the target respondent group for this research.

The survey questionnaire was designed by Ellen Long, in consultation with colleagues and EKOS, to provide a comprehensive profile of individuals who left school early and of their reasons for not pursuing supplementary education or skills upgrades. EKOS programmed the survey instrument for administration over the telephone using Computer-Assisted Telephone Interviewing (CATI) software.

A number of pretests of the survey questionnaire were conducted to ensure that the clarity and flow of the survey instrument were appropriate. Following changes to improve the clarity of some questions, as well as the removal of other questions in order to reduce the overall survey length, full fieldwork for the survey started in February 2001.

Survey Logistics and Response Rate

EKOS assembled a team of 30 fluently bilingual interviewers to conduct the survey, each of whom received specific training for this study, including a review of the study issues and the survey questionnaire items.

Potential respondents were called a maximum of once per day and calls were made no later than 9:00 p.m., unless otherwise requested by the respondent. Further, all telephone numbers were given a rest of one day before subsequent attempts were made to contact the respondent. Appointments were made with potential respondents who expressed a wish to participate at a more convenient time. Respondents were called a maximum of ten times, after which their telephone number was "retired".

Fieldwork for the survey, from pretest to the completion of the last questionnaire, occurred over a 28-day period between January 29 and February 25, 2001.

The response rate for the survey is presented separately for the general public (i.e., numbers pulled from telephone directories) and targeted sub-samples (i.e., numbers from the EKOS database) as well as overall for the total sample (see tables B1, B2, and B3 in Appendix B). The response rate is the proportion of cases from the functional sample that responded to the survey or were "co-operative", either by completing the survey or by responding, yet being screened out of the survey because they were ineligible (i.e., individuals who finished secondary education or who had engaged in some other form of post-secondary education or training). The refusal rate represents the proportion of cases from the functional sample that declined to participate in the survey. The functional sample factors out the attrition in the survey, leaving only the sample that resulted in completions or refusals, and those numbers attempted but not reached by the completion of fieldwork (e.g., retired phone numbers [called 10 or more times], respondents who were unavailable for the duration of the survey, and respondents who were unable to participate due to illness or some other factor, etc.). Attrition includes numbers that were not in service, duplicate numbers, and numbers where the respondent did not speak either French or English. The response rate for the survey was 55.5 per cent among the general public and 74.2 per cent for the targeted sample. The overall response rate for the survey was 59.2 per cent.

Weighting

The data was weighted for age, gender, education level, and province, based on Statistics Canada data of Canadians who have not completed high school. The distributions of the weighted sample on these four variables are found in tables B4 through B7 in Appendix B.

Data analysis

The analysis and presentation of data for this survey are generally straightforward because with the exception of two constructed variables, the findings reported in the next section consist almost exclusively of results for individual interview questions. The interview questions are presented in Appendix A.

The section on needs and motivations requires some clarification. In this section we use responses to several interview questions to construct two higher order variables. The first of these represents an operationalization of need for upgrading. All interviewees in the study had not completed their high school education and had not taken any subsequent upgrading program (or even contacted a program). On this basis, we might assume that most if not all could benefit from upgrading. However, in the interview, our respondents were asked to rate their reading, writing and mathematics skills, and whether they every asked for help in any of these areas, from friends, family, or coworkers. On the basis of responses to these questions, we constructed a "high need/not high need" variable. This variable was used to examine the relationship of need to interviewees' responses to other questions in the interview.

The second variable we constructed concerned likelihood of taking a program. As noted above, those included in this report indicated that they had not previously contacted an upgrading program. What we needed, however, was some measure of their openness to doing so in the future. In particular, we wanted to see how this was related to need, and to perceived barriers to enrolling in programs. Interviewees were asked two questions about their orientation to taking upgrading. They were first asked if they had considered taking an upgrading program at any time since leaving high school. Later in the interview, they were asked if they thought they might take a program within the next five years. On the basis of responses to these questions, we constructed a variable with three categories. The first category consisted of interviewees who had neither considered taking a programs at any time since leaving high school, nor were considering taking one within the next five years. The second category included those who had thought about taking a program sometime since leaving high school but no longer saw this as a possibility. The third category comprised those who had considered taking upgrading after high school and still thought they might do so within the next five years.

CHAPTER 4

FINDINGS

Our interviewees: an introduction

The results presented in this report are based on interviews with a diverse sample of Canadian residents. In this section we provide an introductory profile of our sample. We begin with the three characteristics that we used in weighting our sample to match the larger population: age, sex, and educational attainment. We then look at region and community size, first language and birthplace, household type, and level and source of income.

Age, sex and educational attainment

As outlined above, our sample has been weighted to match the joint distribution of age, sex, and educational attainment of the Canadian adult population without a high school diploma. The median age of our interviewees is 46, meaning that half of respondents are younger than 46; half are older. Less than 20 per cent are under 30; 40 per cent are over age 30 but under 50. Just over 40 per cent are 50 or older (see Table 4.1 below).

Women slightly outnumber men in the sample. As we move from younger to older age cohorts, the proportion of women increases (see Table 4.1 below). Among those 50 or older, almost 60 per cent are women. Women represent more than 60 per cent of interviewees who are 65 and older.

TABLE 4.1 Age and sex

Age Group	Male		Female		Total	Per cent of sample in age group
	Count	%	Count	%		
18-24	37	48.7	39	51.3	76	8.8
25-29	33	47.1	37	52.9	70	8.1
30-34	39	54.2	33	45.8	72	8.3
35-39	47	58.0	34	42.0	81	9.4
40-44	56	58.9	39	41.1	95	11.0
45-49	47	48.0	51	52.0	98	11.3
50-54	36	45.6	43	54.4	79	9.1
55-59	38	41.3	54	58.7	92	10.6
60-64	43	41.7	60	58.3	103	11.9
65-69	38	38.0	62	62.0	100	11.5
All	**414**	**47.8**	**452**	**52.2**	**866**	**100.0**

Our interviewees are divided in roughly equal numbers (loosely into thirds) between those who have elementary school only, those who have attended the junior grades of high school, and those who have attended the senior grades of high school (see Table 4.2 below). Educational attainment is strongly related to age. Over half of interviewees under 25 have reached grade 11 or 12, compared to just over a quarter of those 65 or older. The proportion of respondents with only elementary school education increases sharply with age. Over 40 per cent of interviewees age 55 or older had not attended secondary school.

TABLE 4.2 Educational attainment by age

	Highest Grade Level						
Age Group	**Grades 0-8**	**%**	**Grades 9-10**	**%**	**Grades 11-12**	**%**	**Total**
18-24	8	11.6	24	34.8	37	53.6	**69**
25-29	9	15.8	20	35.1	28	49.1	**57**
30-34	9	14.3	24	38.1	30	47.6	**63**
35-39	18	24.3	26	35.1	30	40.5	**74**
40-44	17	19.1	41	46.1	31	34.8	**89**
45-49	20	22.2	41	45.6	29	32.2	**90**
50-54	25	35.2	22	31.0	24	33.8	**71**
55-59	36	45.0	26	32.5	18	22.5	**80**
60-64	39	43.3	32	35.6	19	21.1	**90**
65+	45	48.9	23	25.0	24	26.1	**92**
All	**226**	**29.2**	**279**	**36.0**	**270**	**34.8**	**775**

Region and community size

Our sample met quotas for interviewees in each province that reflected the relative size of their adult population without a high school diploma (see Table 4.3 below). Inevitably, this means that interviewees from Quebec and Ontario account for 60 per cent of the sample. Just over 10 per cent are from Atlantic Canada and about 30 per cent are from the West. While the sample is dominated by large provinces (in terms of population), most interviewees live in small population centres. Forty per cent come from communities under 15,000 in population; another quarter from small cities with less than 100,000 residents. The largest urban centres, those with populations over 500,000 contribute only about 10 per cent of interviewees. (Another 10 per cent could not estimate the size of their community.)

TABLE 4.3 **Community size by region**[1]

Region	What is the population of the town or city in which you live?										Total	Per cent in Region
	Up to 15,000		15,000 to 99,999		100,000 to 499,999		500,000 or more		Don't Know /Refuse			
	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%		
Atlantic Canada	62	63.9	23	23.7	5	5.2	0	0.0	7	7.2	97	11.3
Quebec	104	47.9	52	24.0	16	7.4	17	7.8	28	12.9	217	25.3
Ontario	84	28.2	80	26.8	69	23.2	35	11.7	30	10.1	298	34.7
Prairies	37	51.4	13	18.1	8	11.1	7	9.7	7	9.7	72	8.4
Alberta	25	33.8	27	36.5	0	0.0	18	24.3	4	5.4	74	8.6
BC	33	32.7	24	23.8	17	16.8	11	10.9	16	15.8	101	11.8
All	**345**	**40.2**	**219**	**25.5**	**115**	**13.4**	**88**	**10.2**	**92**	**10.7**	**859**	**100.0**

1. Community size based on self reports

First language and place of birth

Nine in ten interviewees were born in Canada and about the same number had English or French as their first language (see Table 4.4 below). Just over 60 per cent of interviewees were anglophones; about 30 per cent had French as their first language. Most of those whose first language was other than English or French came from Western or Eastern Europe, or Asia.

TABLE 4.4 First language by place of birth

Place of birth	English		French		Other		All	Per cent of sample in birthplace
	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%		
Canada	508	65.0	238	30.4	36	4.6	**782**	90.3
USA	6	100.0					**6**	0.7
UK	13	92.9	1	7.1			**14**	1.6
Western Europe	3	10.7			25	89.3	**28**	3.2
Eastern Europe					9	100.0	**9**	1.0
Asia	2	14.3			12	85.7	**14**	1.6
South America	1	14.3	1	14.3	5	71.4	**7**	0.8
Other	2	33.3			4	66.7	**6**	0.7
All	**535**	**61.8**	**240**	**27.7**	**91**	**10.5**	**866**	**100.0**

Household type

Households can be categorized in a variety of ways. The categories we use here focus on the nuclear family of adults, partners and their children. Most interviewees, whether men or women, lived with partners (see Table 4.5 on page 43). A third of respondents were in households with a partner but no children. Just under 30 per cent were part of two-parent families with children.

Twenty per cent of interviewees - both women and men - were on their own in single person households. Small minorities were single parents or single people living in their parents' homes. Within these two groups, women are more likely to be single parents; men are more likely to be living with a parent.

Half of all respondents in households with children are under 30. This is the case for both women and men. In contrast, almost three-quarters of women in single person households are 50 or older; almost a third are age 65 and over. We find a similar pattern for female respondents in households with a spouse or partner but without children, with, however, fewer respondents in the oldest age group. Men in single person households and in households with partners alone are more concentrated in the 30-64 age groups, with proportionally fewer age 65 and older. Predictably, over half of single male respondents who live with their parents are under 30; most others are in the 30-49 age group; among women who live with their parents, however, 45 per cent are 50 or older and hence likely to have eldercare responsibilities.

TABLE 4.5 Household type by age and sex

Household Type	18-29		30-49		50-64		65+		All	Per cent of sample
	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%	Count	
Women										
Single person household	2	2.2	22	24.4	37	41.1	29	32.2	**90**	20.0
Single with parents[1]	12	38.7	5	16.1	10	32.3	4	12.9	**31**	6.9
Single, child(ren)[1]	22	53.7	14	34.1	5	12.2	0	0.0	**41**	9.1
Partner/spouse, no child(ren)[2]	7	4.2	31	18.8	98	59.4	29	17.6	**165**	36.7
Partner/spouse with child(ren)[1]	32	26.2	84	68.9	6	4.9	0	0.0	**122**	27.2
All household types (women)	**75**	**16.7**	**156**	**34.7**	**156**	**34.7**	**62**	**13.8**	**449**	100.0
Men										
Single person household	4	4.9	33	40.2	32	39.0	13	15.9	**82**	19.9
Single with parents[1]	28	53.8	14	26.9	7	13.5	3	5.8	**52**	12.6
Single, child(ren)[1]	8	40.0	9	45.0	2	10.0	1	5.0	**20**	4.9
Partner/spouse only[1]	18	13.0	37	48.6	64	93.2	20	21.1	**139**	33.7
Partner, child(ren)[1]	12	10.1	95	79.8	12	10.1	0	0.0	**119**	28.9
All household types (men)	**70**	**17.0**	**188**	**45.6**	**117**	**28.4**	**37**	**9.0**	**412**	100.0

1. A minority of households in these categories include other adults.
2. In 40 cases, respondents reported sharing a household with another adult who was not identified as a partner or spouse.

Income level and source

Over three-quarters of respondents in single person households have incomes under $30,000; over half live on less than $20,000 (see Table 4.6 below). The pattern is similar for single parents and contrasts sharply with the financial situation of respondents in two-parent households with children where almost half report household incomes of $40,000 or more. Couples with children are less well off than couples without children, but better off than singles.

TABLE 4.6 **Household income by household type**

	Less than $20,000		$20,000-$29,999		$30,000-$39,999		$40,000 or more		Total	Per cent in category
	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%	Count	
Single person household	83	53.2	40	25.6	14	9.0	19	12.2	156	20.2
Single with parents[1]	33	45.2	17	23.3	9	12.3	14	19.2	73	9.5
Single, child(ren)[1]	33	60.0	14	25.5	2	3.6	6	10.9	55	7.1
Partner/spouse only[2]	59	22.6	66	25.3	62	23.8	74	28.4	261	29.6
Partner/spouse with child(ren)[1]	29	12.9	37	16.4	49	21.8	110	48.9	225	29.2
All	**237**	**30.7**	**174**	**22.6**	**137**	**17.8**	**223**	**28.9**	**771**	**100.0**

1. A minority of households in these categories include other adults.
2. In 40 cases, respondents reported sharing a household with another adult who was not identified as a partner or spouse.

Just over half of interviewees (54 per cent) cited employment in some form as their main source of income (see Table 4.7 on page 45). Forty per cent had permanent full-time jobs. Thirteen per cent cited pensions or social assistance; just 4 per cent cited (un)employment insurance. Other income sources, mainly pensions, were cited by almost 30 per cent. Interviewees in two-parent households with children show the highest participation rate in permanent full-time employment. Single parents have the lowest rate and are most often reliant on social assistance.

TABLE 4.7 Main source of income by household type

	Full-time permanent		Full-time seasonal		Part-time permanent		Part-time seasonal		Social Asst./ Long-term Disability		E.I.		Other		All
	Count	%	Count		Count	%	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%	
Single person household	50	29.6	5	3.0	11	6.5	5	3.0	36	21.3	5	3.0	57	33.7	**169**
Single with parents[1]	38	48.7	1	1.3	6	7.7	2	2.6	14	17.9	6	7.7	11	14.1	**78**
Single, child(ren)[1]	16	26.7	4	6.7	9	15.0	1	1.7	22	36.7	3	5.0	5	8.3	**60**
Partner/spouse only[2]	106	35.9	6	2.0	17	5.8	8	2.7	29	9.8	7	2.4	122	41.4	**295**
Partner/spouse with child(ren)[1]	126	53.4	20	8.5	12	5.1	5	2.1	6	2.5	11	4.7	56	23.7	**236**
All	336	40.1	36	4.3	55	6.6	21	2.5	107	12.8	33	3.9	250	29.8	**838**

1. A minority of households in these categories include other adults.
2. In 40 cases, respondents reported sharing a household with another adult who was not identified as a partner or spouse.

As noted previously, a substantial proportion of our interviewees are at or beyond retirement age. This means that the overall figures substantially understate the employment rates among those in their economically active years. As shown in Table 4.8 below, among males, over 60 per cent of those 18-29, and 70 per cent of those 30-49 have permanent full-time jobs. This is almost double the rate for women. Moreover, except among those 18-29, women do not have notably higher rates of part-time and seasonal employment than men. Their overall participation in employment in any form is thus substantially lower than that for men.

TABLE 4.8 Source of income by age group and sex

	Age Group									
Source of Income:	**18-29**		**30-49**		**50-64**		**65+**		**Total**	
	Count	**%**	**Count**	**%**	**Count**	**%**	**Count**	**%**	**Count**	**%**
Female										
Full-time permanent job	21	29.2	62	40.3	25	17.2	1	1.7	**109**	25.3
Part-time permanent job	14	19.4	8	5.2	12	8.3	2	3.4	**36**	8.4
Seasonal employment	2	2.8	15	9.7	8	5.5	0	0	**25**	5.8
Social assistance/EI	20	27.8	28	18.2	32	22.1	7	11.9	**87**	20.2
Other, includes pension	15	20.8	41	26.6	68	46.9	49	83.1	**173**	40.2
Total Female	**72**	**100.0**	**154**	**100.0**	**145**	**100.0**	**59**	**100.0**	**430**	**100.0**
Male										
Full-time permanent job	42	61.8	132	70.6	46	39.3	5	13.9	**225**	55.1
Full-time seasonal job	5	7.4	14	7.5	4	3.4			**23**	5.6
Seasonal employment	8	11.8	18	9.6	6	5.1	0	0.0	**32**	7.8
Social assistance/EI	11	16.2	20	10.7	23	19.7	1	2.8	**55**	13.5
Other, includes pension	5	7.4	8	4.3	36	30.8	28	77.8	**77**	18.9
Total Male	**68**	**100.0**	**187**	**100.0**	**117**	**100.0**	**36**	**100.0**	**408**	**100.0**

As would be expected from the preceding information, there is a substantial income gap between single women and men. Among those in single person households, a third of men but only 11 per cent of women have incomes of $30,000 or more (see Table 4.9 below). Over 95 per cent of single mothers have incomes below $30,000 compared to 61 per cent of men who are single parents.

TABLE 4.9 Income level by household type and sex

	Male		Female		Total	
	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%
Single person household						
Less than $30,000	47	66.2	76	89.4	123	78.8
30,000 or more	24	33.8	9	10.6	33	21.2
Total	71	100.0	85	100.0	156	100.0
Single with parents						
Less than $30,000	27	57.4	23	88.5	50	68.5
30,000 or more	20	42.6	3	11.5	23	31.5
Total	47	100.0	26	100.0	73	100.0
Single with children						
Less than $30,000	11	61.1	37	97.4	48	85.7
30,000 or more	7	38.9	1	2.6	8	14.3
Total	18	100.0	38	100.0	56	100.0
Partner/Spouse only						
Less than $30,000	57	43.5	68	51.9	125	47.7
30,000 or more	74	56.5	63	48.1	137	52.3
Total	131	100.0	131	100.0	262	100.0
Partner, child(ren)						
Less than $30,000	26	22.2	41	37.6	67	29.6
30,000 or more	91	77.8	68	62.4	159	70.4
Total	117	100.0	109	100.0	226	100.0

Awareness of upgrading programs

Overall, about 60 per cent of interviewees indicated that they were aware of programs in their communities where people could improve their reading, writing, and math skills. Differences in awareness by age, sex, and education (highest grade) are comparatively narrow (Table 4.10 below). However younger interviewees (18-29), women, and better educated (grades 11 and partial 13) interviewees tended to be more aware of programs than others.

TABLE 4.10 Aware of upgrading programs in your community by age, sex, and highest grade level

	Yes		No			
Age Group	**Count**	**%**	**Count**	**%**	**Total**	**%**
18-29	100	69.0	45	31.0	**145**	**100**
30-49	211	61.2	134	38.8	**345**	**100**
50-64	145	52.9	129	47.1	**274**	**100**
65+	56	56.0	44	44.0	**100**	**100**
Total	**512**	**59.3**	**352**	**40.7**	**864**	**100**
Sex						
Male	229	55.2	186	44.8	**415**	**100.0**
Female	284	63.0	167	37.0	**451**	**100.0**
Total	**513**	**59.2**	**353**	**40.8**	**866**	**100.0**
Highest Grade Level						
0-8	117	51.3	111	48.7	**228**	**100.0**
9-10	164	58.8	115	41.2	**279**	**100.0**
11-12	179	66.1	92	33.9	**271**	**100.0**
Total	**460**	**59.1**	**318**	**40.9**	**778**	**100.0**

Awareness of the General Education Diploma (GED) is similarly widespread; overall, 55 per cent say they are aware of the program (Table 4.11 below). However, in contrast to awareness of upgrading programs in general, knowledge of the GED declines sharply among older age cohorts. Over three-quarters of interviewees under 30 were aware of the program, compared to about 30 per cent of those 65 or older. Differences by sex and education level are, however, similar to those for awareness of upgrading programs in general.

TABLE 4.11 Know about the GED by age, sex, and highest grade level

	Yes		No			
Age group	**Count**	**%**	**Count**	**%**	**Total**	**%**
18-29	88	78.6	24	21.4	**112**	**100.0**
30-49	145	59.2	100	40.8	**245**	**100.0**
50-64	93	46.5	107	53.5	**200**	**100.0**
65+	22	29.3	53.0	70.7	**75**	**100.0**
Total	**348**	**55.1**	**284.0**	**44.9**	**632**	**100.0**
Sex						
Male	142	48.3	152.0	51.7	**294**	**100.0**
Female	207	60.5	135.0	39.5	**342**	**100.0**
Total	**349**	**54.9**	**287.0**	**45.1**	**636**	**100.0**
Highest Grade Level						
0-8	59	41.3	84	58.7	**143.0**	**100.0**
9-10	123	59.4	84	40.6	**207.0**	**100.0**
11-12	149	59.8	100	40.2	**249.0**	**100.0**
Total	**331**	**55.3**	**268**	**44.7**	**599.0**	**100.0**

Needs and motivations: a limited openness to programs

The main purpose of this report is to investigate factors that prevent people who might benefit from literacy and upgrading programs from actually contacting and enrolling in programs. This sounds like a straightforward research question, but it is not. The first issue is how we define those who might benefit from a program. The second issue is how we estimate how likely people are to take a course. We made our first decisions about these issues when we designed the sampling strategy for the survey.

On the issue of program benefits, we only interviewed people who did not have a high school diploma. People were asked about their past and future intentions of taking an upgrading program or getting a high school diploma. Both are viewed here as forms of upgrading and, in the interests of parsimony, are referred to generically as "upgrading" in many places in the text and tables. It is important to note, however, that a high school diploma is an important credential in and of itself. Likelihood of enrolling in an upgrading program may include the desire for such a credential as well as improvement in basic skills.

Excluding people with high school diplomas was a rough and ready attempt to concentrate our efforts on a population that was particularly likely to have relatively weak reading, writing, and mathematics skills. It should be noted that IALS confirms that level of education accounts for about two-thirds of the variation in skills levels (Statistics Canada, 1996). Thus, using formal education as an indirect measure of skills counts for a great deal. (Ideally, as in the IALS study, we would have had actual test scores for respondents.) But not all of our interviewees will have had weak basic skills. There is, moreover, the issue of weak in comparison to what: in comparison to others? In comparison to what they need to do in everyday life right now? In comparison to what they might do if they were more confident of their skills?

On the access issue, the likelihood to enrol in a program, we only included people in the sample who had never even contacted an agency about upgrading. It is, of course conceivable, though not very likely, that many would walk through an agency's door a day or a week or a month after our interview. More to the point, our sample included people of widely different ages, meaning some were out of high school only a few years while others were decades past the end of their formal schooling. Interviewees, then, varied widely in the number of years they had 'resisted' taking an upgrading program. Put another way, interviewees have different histories of 'resistance.' It likely means something different if a 55 year old with a grade 8 education has avoided upgrading for the past three and a half decades than if a 20 year old has done the same thing for only a few years.

In the case of both program benefit and likelihood of taking an upgrading program, we needed a way of looking for differences among our interviewees. On the first issue, we essentially asked respondents to assess their own skill levels and need for assistance. In the second case, we asked them to rate their chances of taking a program to upgrade basic skills or complete a high school diploma in the next five years.

Self-assessed skill levels and need for assistance

Interviewees were asked to rate, separately, their reading, writing, and mathematics skills. They were offered a four-point scale: excellent, good, moderate, and poor. They were then asked whether they ever asked friends, co-workers, or family members to help them with reading, writing, or math, and if so, in what skill areas. (Both sets of questions occurred late in the interview.)

Interviewees reported considerable confidence in their basic skills. Overall, more than 60 per cent (62 per cent) of our sample rated their reading skills as excellent or good.

TABLE 4.12 Self-reported reading skills by highest grade level

Reading Skills	**Highest Grade Level**							
	Grades 0-8		**Grades 9-10**		**Grades 11-12/13**			
	Count	**%**	**Count**	**%**	**Count**	**%**	**Total[1]**	**%**
Excellent	31	13.6	71	25.4	70	25.9	**188**	21.7
Good	82	36.0	121	43.2	124	45.9	**353**	40.8
Moderate	79	34.6	58	20.7	55	20.4	**220**	25.4
Group	**192**	**84.1**	**250**	**89.2**	**249**	92.3	**762**	87.9
Moderate, ask for help with reading	9	3.9	8	2.9	5	1.9	**28**	3.3
Poor	17	7.5	10	3.6	7	2.6	**39**	4.5
Poor, ask for help with reading	10	4.4	12	4.3	9	3.3	**37**	4.3
Group	**36**	**15.9**	**30**	**10.8**	**21**	7.7	**105**	12.1
Total	**228**	**100.0**	**280**	**100.0**	**270**	**100.0**	**866**	100.0

1. Includes people with other levels of education or who did not state their education.

Just over half offered similar ratings of their writing skills.

TABLE 4.13 Self-reported writing skills by highest grade level

Writing Skills	Highest Grade Level Grades 0-8 Count	%	Grades 9-10 Count	%	Grades 11-12/13 Count	%	Total[1]	%
Excellent	13	5.7	37	13.3	49	18.1	105	12.1
Good	74	32.6	115	41.4	116	42.8	331	38.3
Moderate	72	31.7	79	28.4	74	27.3	251	29.1
Group	**158**	**69.6**	**231**	**83.1**	**239**	**87.9**	**687**	79.2
Moderate, ask for help with reading	16	7.0	14	5.0	12	4.4	53	6.2
Poor	30	13.2	17	6.1	16	5.9	73	8.5
Poor, ask for help with reading	22	9.7	16	5.8	4	1.5	50	5.8
Group	**69**	**30.4**	**47**	**16.9**	**33**	**12.1**	**177**	20.4
Total	**227**	**100**	**278**	**100**	**271**	**100**	**863**	100

[1] Includes people with other levels of education or who did not state their education.

Interviewees were more modest in evaluating their ability in math; just over 40 per cent offered self-ratings of excellent or good (Table 4.14 below).

TABLE 4.14 Self-reported math skills by highest grade level

Math Skills	Highest Grade Level							
	Grades 0-8		Grades 9-10		Grades 11-12/13			
	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%	Total[1]	%
Excellent	15	6.6	24	8.6	31	11.5	**72**	8.3
Good	66	28.9	110	39.4	85	31.6	**283**	32.8
Moderate	82	36.0	71	25.4	89	33.1	**271**	31.4
Group	**163**	**71.8**	**204**	**73.4**	**206**	**76.3**	**626**	72.2
Moderate, ask for help with reading	19	8.3	18	6.5	27	10.0	**76**	8.9
Poor	31	13.6	31	11.1	21	7.8	**96**	11.2
Poor, ask for help with reading	15	6.6	25	9.0	16	5.9	**63**	7.3
Group	**64**	**28.2**	**74**	**26.6**	**64**	**23.7**	**236**	27.2
Total	**228**	**100.0**	**279**	**100.0**	**269**	**100.0**	**861**	100.0

1. Includes people with other levels of education or who did not state their education.

Most others rated their skills in each area as moderate. Only small minorities rated their skills as poor: about 10 per cent for reading, 15 per cent for writing, and 20 per cent for math. It is important to note that most people identified by IALS as having literacy challenges do not identify themselves as such (Statistics Canada 1996).

Very few interviewees who rated themselves as excellent or good in a skill area indicated that they also asked for help from friends, family, or co-workers in this area. However, 10-20 · per cent, (depending on skill area) of those rating their skills as moderate reported that they asked for help. The figure is 40 per cent or more in the case of interviewees who rated their skills as poor.

Almost identical proportions of women and men are categorized as high need, based on self-reported basic skill levels and patterns of asking others for assistance. Age bears a weak relationship to being high need in any skill area (Table 4.15 below). Younger respondents, and particularly those under 25, are less likely to be high need than those who are older, particularly those 50 and over.

TABLE 4.15 Distribution of high need interviewees by age group

Age group	At least one skill area self-rated poor, or self-rated moderate (with help required)				Base for per cent
	Yes		No		
	Count	%	Count	%	
18-24	33	43.4	43	56.6	76
25-29	39	56.5	30	43.5	69
30-34	43	60.6	28	39.4	71
35-39	45	56.3	35	43.8	80
40-44	52	54.7	43	45.3	95
45-49	57	58.2	41	41.8	98
50-54	52	66.7	26	33.3	78
55-59	56	60.9	36	39.1	92
60-64	70	68.0	33	32.0	103
65-69	62	62.6	37	37.4	99
All	**509**	**59.1**	**352**	**40.9**	**861**

High need groups and educational attainment

We have used the responses to the self-rating questions to identify a 'high need' group in each skill area. This group is shown in the blue shaded area in Tables 4.12 to 4.14. The high need group for each skill area consists of those who rated their skills as poor, and those who rated them as moderate, but also reported that they asked friends, co-workers or family members for help.

The high need groups include just over 10 per cent of respondents in the case of reading, and just under 20 per cent of the sample for writing. Interviewees who left school at or before grade 8 are somewhat more likely to be included in high need groups for reading or writing. But even here, those who report high need are a minority: 16 per cent in the case of reading and 30 per cent in the case of writing. Formal education makes relatively little difference in the case of mathematics. Overall, just over 25 per cent report high need in math.

In the preceding we have looked at high need groups separately in each skill area. However, we also considered how many of our interviewees were included in at least one high need group. As Table 4.16 on page 57 indicates, overall almost 40 per cent of our sample was included in one or more high need groups. Fully half of those who left school at or before grade 8 were included in high need groups in at least one skill area.

TABLE 4.16 Number of basic skills areas self-rated poor, or self-rated moderate (with help required) by highest grade level

Number of basic skill areas self-rated poor, or self-rated moderate (with help required)	Highest Grade Level Grades 0-8		Grades 9-10		Grades 11-12/13			
	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%	Total[1]	%
None	114	49.8	174	62.1	183	67.3	**513**	59.2
One	71	31.0	73	26.1	61	22.4	**230**	26.6
Two	32	14.0	18	6.4	26	9.6	**83**	9.6
Three	12	5.2	15	5.4	2	0.7	**40**	4.6
Total	**229**	**100.0**	**280**	**100.0**	**272**	**100.0**	**866**	**100.0**

1. Includes people with other levels of education or who did not state their education.

In our analyses of interviewees' attitudes toward upgrading and/or high school completion, we have used their own reports about their skills to identify high need group membership. That membership is then used as the most important measure of potential to benefit from an upgrading program. We make little direct use of years of schooling as a measure of needs. The impact of differences in years of formal education seems essentially captured in the higher proportion of high need group members among those with grade 8 completion or less.

Current expectations of taking an upgrading program

The impact of age and sex

Early in the interview, respondents were asked if they thought they might take a program to upgrade their reading, writing or math, or to get a high school diploma sometime in the next five years.

As shown inTable 4.17 below, just under 25 per cent said yes; about half this number said 'maybe'. However, well over half of interviewees stated that they did not expect to take a program. Women are as apt as men to say they expect to take an upgrading program or complete a high school diploma within the next five years.

TABLE 4.17 **Might you take a program to upgrade your reading, writing, or math, or to get your high school diploma in the next five years?**

	Count	%
Yes	209	24.2
Maybe	115	13.3
No	511	59.0
Don't know	31	3.6
Total	**866**	**100.0**

At the extremes, knowing a person's age seems almost all we need to know to predict their interest and intentions regarding upgrading programs. Among those 18-24, 83 per cent have considered upgrading since leaving school; 61 per cent expect to take a program in the next five years, a figure that increases to 81 per cent if we include those who say they may do so (see Table 4.18 on page 59). In contrast, of those 65 and older, less than 30 per cent report that they have considered taking a program since they left school. Only 3 per cent currently expect to take a program within five years; the figure is 7 per cent if we include the "maybes."

TABLE 4.18 Interest in upgrading programs by age group

Age Group	Since leaving high school have you thought about upgrading?			Do you think you might take upgrading next 5 years?				
	Yes	%	Base for %	Yes	%	Yes & Maybe	%	Base for %
18-24	62	82.7	75	47	62.7	61	81.3	75
25-29	59	84.3	70	39	58.2	50	74.6	67
30-34	53	73.6	72	24	34.3	34	48.6	70
35-39	51	63.0	81	30	38.5	42	53.8	78
40-44	70	74.5	94	23	26.4	45	51.7	87
45-49	62	63.3	98	15	16.5	35	38.5	91
50-54	42	53.8	78	14	19.2	22	30.1	73
55-59	40	43.5	92	5	5.6	15	16.7	90
60-64	32	31.1	103	9	8.9	12	11.9	101
65+	29	29.3	99	3	3.0	4	4.0	99
All	**500**	**58.0**	**862**	**209**	**25.2**	**320**	**38.5**	**831**

Interest and intentions to participate in upgrading progressively decline with age although there seem to be important points of transition within the series. Between the 25-29 and 30-34 age cohorts there is a sharp drop in intended participation rate from near 60 to less than 40 per cent. A further drop of 20 per cent occurs between the 35-39 and 45-49 age cohorts. A further 10 per cent drop around age 55 brings the proportion who expect to do upgrading within the next five years below the 10 per cent level.

Age and generation

There are different ways of making sense of age differences. We can think of age as an indicator of a person's stage in life. We can also see age in terms of generations or cohorts. In the first instance, we say a person 50 years old in 2001 is middle-aged. In the second instance, we say she/he is a Baby Boomer. Are older respondents less likely to expect to take a program in the next five years because they are older or because the cohorts they belong to are less predisposed to upgrading?

What perspective we should take is particularly difficult to decide in the case of interviewees' reports about whether they had considered upgrading or high school completion at any point since leaving school. The older a person, the more time has passed since they left school, hence the longer period in which they might have been moved to consider upgrading. Put differently, the older a person, the more age statuses they will have passed through in which they might have considered upgrading. A seventy year old might have considered taking a program when young, in middle age and/or on achieving the status of senior. In this case our choice is not between age status and generation, but extent of experience in a sequence of age statuses (e.g., youth, middle age, senior) versus generation.

We have seen previously that the proportion of respondents who report that they have considered upgrading or high school completion at any point since leaving school actually declines with age. This suggests that we are seeing mainly generational differences, since it is difficult to see how going through more life stages would otherwise lead a person to be less likely to think of upgrading. This is an optimistic conclusion since it suggests that participation rates in upgrading programs may go up simply on the basis of changing generations. However, it also creates problems of interpretation in the case of responses to other questions. We would be unwilling to ascribe differences in current expectations of taking a program purely - or perhaps even mainly - to generational effects. For example, the very sharp decline in expected participation that sets in between 55 and 59 seems to signal a fairly abrupt change in interests associated with pending retirement.

Much depends on what people were actually thinking about in the interview. The question of whether the interviewee had ever considered upgrading or high school completion is asked very early in the interview. It is, in fact, the third question asked. At this early stage interviewees have had little time to orient to the theme of the questions. They have had no previous cue that they should be thinking about their past experiences. It seems likely, then, that people responded by thinking of their immediate past, which for older respondents meant discounting the bulk of their experience. In this context, age differences may well reference differences associated with current life stage rather than life history.

The impact of high need

We find that those we have identified as high need are more likely than others to think that they might take a program (see Table 4.19 below). Interviewees who are high need in a single skill area are almost twice as likely (33 per cent versus 18 per cent) to expect to take an upgrading program as those who are not high need in any area. Overall, almost half of those categorized as high need rate taking a program as a possibility (combining "yes" and "maybe" responses) compared to 31 per cent of those who are not high need.

TABLE 4.19 Expect to take an upgrading program in next five years by number of basic skills areas self-rated poor, or self-rated moderate (with help required)

Number of basic skill areas self-rated poor, or self-rated moderate (with help required)	Expect to take program				Base for per cent[1]
	Yes		Yes or Maybe		
	Count	%	Count	%	
None	87	17.6	151	30.6	494
One	74	33.3	109	49.1	222
Two	31	38.8	45	56.3	80
Three	17	43.6	18	46.2	39

1. Excludes those who responded, "Don't know."

The above means that high need interviewees are over-represented among those likely to take a program. Those with high need in at least one skill area represent about 40 per cent of our sample (see Table 4.16 on page 57). However, they account for almost 60 per cent of those who expect to take an upgrading program or pursue a high school diploma in the next five years (see Table 4.20 on page 63). Thus the majority of those most likely to enrol have at least one self-reported high need.

TABLE 4.20 **Number of basic skills areas self-rated poor, or self-rated moderate (with help required) among those expecting to take an upgrading program in next five years**

Number of basic skill areas self-rated poor, or self-rated moderate (with help required)	Expect to take program			
	Yes		Yes or Maybe	
	Count	%	Count	%
None	87	41.6	151	46.7
One	74	35.4	109	33.7
Two	31	14.8	45	13.9
Three	17	8.1	18	5.6
Total	**209**	**100.0**	**323**	**100.0**

Being high need appears to have its greatest impact on attitudes to upgrading among the young. AsTable 4.21 on page 64 shows, not only does the expectation of taking an upgrading program decline with age, but also the apparent relevance of high need to that expectation. Among those under 30, there is more than a 25 per cent difference between the proportion of high need interviewees who expected to take a program (the "yes" group) and the corresponding proportion of those not high need in any skill areas. Among those 50 and over, the difference is less than 10 per cent. In other words while older respondents are more likely to be high need, high need among this group is less likely to be associated with expectations of taking a program than among the young. Put another way, the fact that a somewhat higher proportion of older people are high need does not tell us very much about the decline in expectations of their taking a program.

TABLE 4.21 Expectation of taking a course by high need by age group

Age Group	High Needs	Do you think you might take upgrading next 5 years?						
		Yes		Maybe		No		
		Count	%	Count	%	Count	%	Total
18-29	No	34	47.9	14	19.7	23	32.4	71
	Yes	52	74.3	11	15.7	7	10.0	70
Total		**86**	**61.0**	**25**	**17.7**	**30**	**21.3**	**141**
30-49	No	38	20.7	40	21.7	106	57.6	184
	Yes	54	37.8	25	17.5	64	44.8	143
Total		**92**	**28.1**	**65**	**19.9**	**170**	**52.0**	**327**
50-64	No	14	8.1	7	4.0	152	87.9	173
	Yes	14	15.2	15	16.3	63	68.5	92
Total		**28**	**10.6**	**22**	**8.3**	**215**	**81.1**	**265**
65+	No	1	1.6	1	1.6	61	96.8	63
	Yes	3	7.9	0	0.0	35	92.1	38
Total		**4**	**4.0**	**1**	**1.0**	**96**	**95.0**	**101**

Those who report high need, whether in reading, writing, or math groups are more likely than others to report that they expect to take an upgrading program in the next five years. In the case of writing, for example, just over 20 per cent of those who are not high need answer 'yes' to the question of taking a program in the next five years, compared to almost 40 per cent in the high need group (see Table 4.22 on page 65). If we include those who indicated that they may enrol, then just over half of high need interviewees think taking a program is at least a possibility compared to just over a third of others.

TABLE 4.22 Expect to take an upgrading program in next five years by self-reported writing skills

Writing Skills	Expect to take program				Base for per cent[1]
	Yes		Yes or Maybe		
	Count	%	Count	%	
Excellent	21	20.8	28	27.7	101
Good	73	23.0	117	36.8	318
Moderate	48	19.1	88	36.5	241
Group	**142**	**21.5**	**233**	**35.3**	**661**
Moderate, Ask for help with reading	19	38.0	25	50.0	50
Poor	29	39.2	36	49.3	73
Poor, Ask for help with reading	18	37.5	28	58.3	48
Group	**67**	**39.0**	**91**	**52.9**	**172**

1. Excludes those who responded "Don't know"

We get a somewhat different picture, however, when we look at the composition of those expecting to take a program (rather than looking at groups defined by need). Reading skills offer a particularly dramatic contrast. Over half of those expecting to take a program rate their reading skills as good to excellent; less than 20 per cent have high need for upgrading in this area. For writing as well, high need interviewees who expect to take a course are outnumbered by those who rate their skills good or excellent (see Table 4.23 on page 66). Only in the case of math are the numbers about equal, that is, about half of potential participants are high need. In interviewees' own minds their needs for upgrading are relatively specific. They see that they are weak in a particular area but are relatively confident about their skills in other areas.

TABLE 4.23 **Expectation of taking an upgrading program by views on personal access to postsecondary education**

Thought about entering college or university	Would need to upgrade beforehand	Expect to take a program & have at least one high need skill area						Total
		Yes		Maybe		No		
		Count	%	Count	%	Count		
No	No	13	12.1	11	10.3	83	77.6	**107**
Yes	No	16	34.8	6	13.0	24	52.2	**46**
No	Yes	90	19.2	55	11.7	324	69.1	**469**
Yes	Yes	87	59.6	34	23.3	25	17.1	**146**
Total		**206**	**26.8**	**106**	**13.8**	**456**	**59.4**	**768**

High need and educational attainment

In the preceding sections, we have focused on interviewees' self-reports of weakness in basic skills areas rather than level of schooling. As we saw earlier, those with only elementary school education are more likely to fall in our high need groups for reading and writing than those with grade 9 or higher (see Table 4.12 on page 52 and Table 4.13 on page 53). Just over half of those with elementary school only are high need in at least one skill area. (see Table 4.16 on page 57). However, the relationship between level of schooling and high need is not strong; most interviewees in our high need groups have, in fact, attended high school.

Since respondents' self-assessments are not closely linked to level of schooling, we do not expect level of schooling to be a good predictor of interest in upgrading programs or high school completion. However, it could still be argued that level of schooling provides an indirect indicator of need (defined as lack of educational inputs earlier in life) that is more 'objective' than self-assessments. We might find evidence of this by seeing if educational level has an impact on expectations of taking a course, above and beyond the impact of self-assessed need. Table 4.24 below addresses this question. It shows the relationship of membership in at least one high need group to expectations of taking an upgrading course, separately for the elementary (grades 0-8) and secondary school (9-12/13) categories.

TABLE 4.24 Expect to take a program by high need by highest grade level

Highest grade achieved	At least one basic skill area self-rated poor, or self-rated moderate (with help required)	Expect to take program			
		Yes		Yes or Maybe	
		Count	%	Count	%
0-8	No	7	6.4	19	17.3
	Yes	26	23.6	42	38.2
All		**33**	**15.0**	**61**	**27.7**
9-12/13	No	70	20.3	116	33.6
	Yes	75	40.3	104	55.9
All		**145**	**27.3**	**220**	**41.4**
Interviewees Under Age 50					
0-8	No	5	16.7	14	46.7
	Yes	20	42.6	28	59.6
All		**25**	**32.5**	**42**	**54.6**
9-12/13	No	59	29.8	96	48.5
	Yes	72	49.7	97	66.9
All		**131**	**38.2**	**193**	**56.3**

The results are somewhat surprising if we think of education level only as a measure of needs. In both schooling categories, those in at least one high need group are more likely to expect to take a program than those who have no high need. So the relationship of intensity of needs to expected participation persists across education categories. What is striking, however, is that those in the elementary school category are less likely to expect to take a program whether they are high need or not. In other words, no matter how they assess their own skills, interviewees were more likely to expect to take an upgrading program the higher their level of schooling. This makes little sense if we simply associate lesser exposure to formal schooling with higher need. But it is an almost universal finding in studies of participation in adult or continuing education generally.

There are various explanations for this phenomenon. Some focus on education level as a measure of capacity to deal with provider agencies; others as a measure of a positive view or at least tolerance of formal school settings. However, it is also possible that education is not what makes the difference, but something else that is historically associated with education - age. In most countries undergoing sustained economic development, the average length of formal schooling has increased over time. Thus, it is not surprising to find that interviewees with only elementary schooling are also more likely to be older than those with some high school.

When we control for age by excluding those 50 and older from our analysis, we find a different pattern between needs and expectations about taking an upgrading program or getting a high school diploma. Differences in expectations among elementary and secondary categories as a whole are minimal. Thirty-three per cent in the elementary school category expect to take an upgrading program compared to 38 per cent of the secondary school category. Those who are members of at least one high need group are now almost equally likely (43 versus 50 per cent) to expect to take a program, whether they have elementary or secondary level schooling. Among those who are not high need, differences in expectations are narrower than before, and disappear if we add in those who responded 'maybe' to the question of taking a program within the next five years. If level of schooling does have an impact on needs, this impact is not felt in expectations of taking a course.

It seems obvious. People who recognize that they have serious weaknesses in a least one skill area will be more open to seriously considering an upgrading program. The survey findings bear this out, but they also suggest something else - that intensity of need only goes so far in explaining interest in upgrading. Over 40 per cent of interviewees who told us they might take an upgrading program, also indicated that their skills in all areas were moderate, good or excellent, and that they did not have to ask for help. Most others indicated that they had serious weakness in only one of the three skill areas.

High need and self-assessed preparedness for postsecondary education

In the previous sections we looked at self-assessed basic skill levels in relation to current expectations of taking an upgrading program or a high school diploma in the next five years. We also asked interviewees about their educational aspirations and how they would assess their preparedness for postsecondary education. Specifically, people were asked first whether they had considered going to college or university in the past five years, and second, if they were to do so, whether they could enter directly or would need to take an upgrading program or complete high school. The second question was asked of all interviewees whether or not they had actually ever considered taking a postsecondary program. It should be noted that the question did not allow respondents to distinguish between needing an upgrading program to actually improve their skills versus simply meeting college or university admission requirements. Thus respondents who did not think they had skill deficiencies might still indicate that they needed a program like the GED for admissions purposes.

Overall, most interviewees had not recently considered taking a postsecondary program. Most also thought that they would need a prior upgrading program if they were to enter a college or university program. Together the two questions yielded four categories of interviewees. The largest category by far are those who had not actually considered taking a postsecondary program but stated if they did, they would need to do upgrading beforehand. Just over 60 per cent fall into this category (see Table 4.25 on page 71). In contrast less than 20 per cent had both considered a program and thought they would need upgrading. Only small minorities are found in the two categories of interviewees who did not think they would need prior upgrading.

TABLE 4.25 **High need groups by views on personal access to postsecondary education**

Considered entering college or university	Would need upgrading beforehand	At least one high need skill area				Total	Per cent of sample in category
		No		Yes			
		Count	%	Count	%		
No	No	90	82.6	19	17.4	**109**	13.7
Yes	No	34	69.4	15	30.6	**49**	6.2
No	Yes	278	57.1	209	42.9	**487**	61.3
Yes	Yes	70	47.0	79	53.0	**149**	18.8
Total		**472**	**59.4**	**322**	**53.0**	**794**	100.0

As might be expected, interviewees who did not think they needed upgrading for college or university study were much less likely to be high need than those who did not think direct entry was a option. Only 31 per cent of those who thought about a postsecondary program and assumed they could enter directly are categorized here as high need. In contrast, 53 per cent of those who had thought about college or university but felt they needed upgrading first, fall in the high need group.

Clearly, however, many who are not high need also see an upgrading program as necessary. Some of these interviewees may simply see this in terms of meeting admission requirements. For others, however, it may be a difference in standards. They see their skills as quite adequate for their current activities, but not for coping with postsecondary education.

Expectations of upgrading and views on preparedness for postsecondary education

We would expect that someone who has both thought about taking a postsecondary program and thinks they would need upgrading beforehand would be particularly likely to anticipate doing upgrading in the next five years. In fact 60 per cent of inteviewees in this category said that they might take an upgrading and most others offered a qualified 'maybe' (Table 4.26 below). In sharp contrast, almost 70 per cent of interviewees who believed they would need upgrading or high school completion before taking a postsecondary program, but had not recently considered entering college or university, did not expect to take upgrading in the next five years.

TABLE 4.26 Self-reported writing skills of those expecting to take an upgrading program in next five years

Writing Skills	Expect to take program			
	Yes		Yes or Maybe	
	Count	%	Count	%
Excellent	21	10.1	28	8.7
Good	73	35.1	117	36.3
Moderate	48	23.1	88	27.3
Group	**142**	**68.3**	**233**	**72.3**
Moderate, Ask for help with reading	19	9.1	25	7.8
Poor	29	13.9	36	11.2
Poor, Ask for help with reading	18	8.7	28	8.7
Group	**66**	**31.7**	**89**	**27.7**
Total	**208**	**100.0**	**322**	**100.0**

Interest in postsecondary education is thus a strong motivator in considering a program to improve basic skills. Even those who think they could enter a college or university program directly and have recently thought about doing so, are more likely to expect to take an upgrading course in the next five years. A third rate this a definite possibility; another 13 per cent offered a qualified "maybe".

More than 40 per cent of interviewees 18-24 were found among those who were both interested in taking a postsecondary program and thought they would need to do an upgrading program beforehand (Table 4.27 below). What is more surprising is that over 20 per cent of each age cohort under 50 was also both interested in college or university training and aware that they needed to improve their basic skills.

TABLE 4.27 Views on personal access to postsecondary education by age

Considered entering college or university	No		No		Yes		Yes		**Total**
Would need upgrading beforehand	No		Yes		No		Yes		
	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%	
18-24	7	9.6	26	35.6	8	11.0	32	43.8	**73**
25-29	8	11.6	29	42.0	14	20.3	18	26.1	**69**
30-34	7	10.8	36	55.4	5	7.7	17	26.2	**65**
35-39	8	10.4	42	54.5	6	7.8	21	27.3	**77**
40-44	12	13.0	50	54.3	8	8.7	22	23.9	**92**
45-49	14	14.6	60	62.5	1	1.0	21	21.9	**96**
50-54	10	14.5	50	72.5	4	5.8	5	7.2	**69**
55-59	12	14.5	64	77.1	0	0.0	7	8.4	**83**
60-64	16	18.2	64	72.7	2	2.3	6	6.8	**88**
65-69	16	19.0	65	77.4	3	3.6	0	0.0	**84**
Total	**110**	**13.8**	**486**	**61.1**	**51**	**6.4**	**149**	**18.7**	**796**

With the exception of those 25-29, up to age 50, the overwhelming majority who are thinking of postsecondary education also believe that they need to do upgrading first. After 50, interest in taking a college or university program in general essentially evaporates and with it, a strong motivation to think about upgrading programs. This pattern is particularly troubling as we will see that among older people who reported at some point thinking about upgrading, educational reasons were the most prominent.

Once and future interests in upgrading

We suggested in *Stage One: Interviews from Across Canada* (Long and Taylor, 2002) that people who might benefit from programs often had an experience that led them to consider upgrading. However, other factors came into play that prevented them from going on to actually contact and enrol in a program. Our large scale survey provides some support for this view. Only a quarter of respondents said "yes" to the question of whether they thought they might take upgrading in the next five years. However, over twice this number (58 per cent) said that they had thought about doing so at some point since they left school (Table 4.28 below).

TABLE 4.28 At any time since leaving high school have you ever thought about the idea of taking a program or getting your high school diploma, even if it was only a brief thought?

	Count	%
Yes	502	58.0
No	363	41.9
Don't know	1	0.1
Total	**866**	**100.0**

Of those who had once considered upgrading, just over a third (37 per cent) still expect they might do so in the next five years. But slightly more (40 per cent), reject the idea of taking a basic skills or high school diploma program in the foreseeable future (Table 4.29 on page 76). It is useful for our further analysis to think of those who had both thought about taking an upgrading program since leaving school *and* report that they would or might take an upgrading program in the next five years as "Persisters," and those who had thought about it but report that they would not take an upgrading program in the next five years as "Discontinuers."

TABLE 4.29 Taking an upgrading program: past thoughts and current expectations

Since leaving high school have you ever thought about taking a program to upgrade your reading, writing, or math or to get your high school diploma?	Do you think you might take a program to upgrade your reading, writing, or math or to get your high school diploma sometime in the next five years?								
	Yes		Maybe		No		Don't know		Total
	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%	
Yes	187	37.2	97	19.3	201	40.0	18	3.6	**503**
No	23	6.3	17	4.7	310	85.4	13	3.6	**363**
Total	**210**	**24.2**	**114**	**13.2**	**511**	**59.0**	**31**	**3.6**	**866**

With respect to age, the 18-29 age cohort has by far the highest proportion of Persisters - 77 per cent, compared to 46 per cent for those 30-49, 13 per cent for the 50-64 group and 2 per cent (2/97) for those 65 and over (Table 4.30 below). The relative size of the age cohorts, however, means that the 30-49 cohort accounts for half of all Persisters. Within this group we have seen that the intention of taking a program slips steadily away year by year from age 40.

TABLE 4.30 Past history of thinking about taking a program/expectations for the next five years by age group: distribution of Persisters and Discontinuers

	Since leaving school, thought about taking a program/ Expect to take program in next five years							
Thought about program	**Persisters Yes/Yes-Maybe**		**Discontinuers Yes/*No***		**No/*No***		**Total**	
Age Group	**Count**	**%**	**Count**	**%**	**Count**	**%**	**Count**	**%**
18-29	103	36.7	16	8.0	15	4.9	**134**	16.9
30-49	143	50.9	80	39.8	89	28.8	**312**	39.4
50-64	33	11.7	78	38.9	137	44.3	**248**	31.4
65+	2	0.7	27	13.4	68	22.0	**97**	12.3
All	**281**	**100**	**200**	**100**	**309**	**100**	**791**	**100**

Almost half of those who said they had considered upgrading or high school completion also report that this was for work-related reasons (see Table 4.31 below). Over a quarter cited educational reasons, either general educational goals, or, less frequently, the need for upgrading in order to enter a particular educational program. In contrast, only a tiny minority cited family, community, or daily living reasons. High need is not associated with any particular reason for considering a program.

TABLE 4.31 Reasons for thinking of taking a program since leaving school by high need status

Reasons for thinking of taking a program	At least one skill area self-rated poor, or moderate (with help required)					
	No		Yes		Total	
	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%
Work related	136	48.7	107	47.1	**243**	**48.0**
Upgrading to enter other education	27	9.7	22	9.7	**49**	**9.7**
Family, community, daily living	18	6.5	9	4.0	**27**	**5.3**
General educational purposes	57	20.4	46	20.3	**103**	**20.4**
Other	41	14.7	43	18.9	**84**	**16.6**
All reasons	**279**	**100.0**	**227**	**100.0**	**506**	**100.0**

Those in high need groups offer similar reasons to others. Similarly, level of schooling makes little difference, overall, to the reasons offered (see Table 4.32 on page 78). In particular, those in the elementary category are not significantly more likely to cite educational reasons.

TABLE 4.32 **Reasons for taking a program since leaving school by highest grade level**

Highest grade	0-8				9-11				12-13			
	At least one skill area self-rated poor, or self-rated moderate (with help required)											
Reasons for taking a program	No		Yes		No		Yes		No		Yes	
	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%
Work related	21	42.0	25	46.3	99	49.0	69	48.6	46	44.2	168	48.0
Upgrading to enter other education	5	10.0	4	7.4	20	9.9	18	12.7	10	9.6	37	10.5
Family, community, daily living	1	2.0	3	5.6	15	7.4	4	2.8	4	3.8	19	5.2
General educational purposes	20	40.0	13	24.1	35	17.3	27	19.0	32	30.8	62	21.1
Other	3	6.0	9	16.7	33	16.3	24	16.9	12	11.5	56	15.2
All reasons	50	100.0	54	100.0	202	100.0	142	1000	104	100.0	342	100.0

Age is related to the reasons interviewees gave for considering upgrading at some point since leaving school. As shown in Table 4.33 below, as we move from younger to older cohorts, the proportion of interviewees citing work-related reasons for thinking about upgrading declines. At the same time, the proportion offering educational reasons, either to gain entry to a particular education program or for "general educational purposes", increases.

TABLE 4.33 Reasons for thinking about taking a program since leaving school, by age group[1]

	18-29		30-49		50-64		65+	
Reasons for taking a program	**Count**	**%**	**Count**	**%**	**Count**	**%**	**Count**	**%**
Work related	63	53.8	112	48.7	45	40.2	7	24.1
Upgrading to enter other education	3	2.6	23	10.0	17	15.2	7	24.1
Family, community, daily living	7	6.0	8	3.5	7	6.3	3	10.3
General educational purposes	22	18.8	40	17.4	30	26.8	11	37.9
Other	22	18.8	47	20.4	13	11.6	1	3.4
All	117	100.0	230	100.0	112	100.0	29	100.0

1. Responses of interviewees who indicated that they had considered upgrading.

Women are as likely as men to have considered taking an upgrading program since leaving school, and their reasons for doing so are very similar to those of men. Both sexes cited work-related reasons about half the time, followed by general educational purposes.

We looked at whether those who still expected to take a program in the next five years had had a different mix of reasons for thinking about taking a program than those who no longer expected to do so. This might be the case if some reasons were typically more urgent than others For example, work-related reasons might represent a more serious motivation for individuals to take upgrading than an interest in pursuing more education generally. As well, some reasons for taking a program may be more long-lived than others. For example, it may be that upgrading for work is a career-long concern whereas improving skills to meet family situations ceases to be an important concern once children reach a certain age. If this were the case, we would expect work-related concerns to be more common among those still interested in taking a course than among those no longer interested.

In fact, as Table 4.34 below indicates, the profiles of Persisters and Discontinuers are almost identical when it comes to reasons for considering an upgrading program or getting a high school diploma. (Persisters are those who indicated both that they had thought of taking a course at some point since leaving school and that they currently expected they might take a program in the next five years. These represent the Yes/Yes group in Table 4.34 below. Discontinuers once considered taking a program but no longer expect to do so. (These represent the Yes/No group.) This means that knowing why a person considered upgrading after leaving school does not help predict the likelihood that they will currently be interested in taking a program.

TABLE 4.34 **Reasons for taking a program since leaving school by past history of thinking about taking a program and expectations for the next five years by high need group membership**

	Since leaving school, thought about taking a program/ Expect to take program in next five years					
	Yes/*Yes* Persisters		**Yes/*No* Discontinuers**		**Total**	
Reasons for taking a program	**Count**	**%**	**Count**	**%**	**Count**	**%**
Work related	136	48.7	107.0	47.1	**243**	**48.0**
Upgrading to enter other education	27	9.7	22.0	9.7	**49**	**9.7**
Family, community, daily living	18	6.5	9.0	4.0	**27**	**5.3**
General educational purposes	57	20.4	46.0	20.3	**103**	**20.4**
Other	41	14.7	43.0	18.9	**84**	**16.6**
All	**279**	**100.0**	**227.0**	**100.0**	**506**	**100.0**

Persisters: the impact of high need and interest in postsecondary education

We saw earlier that those in high need groups, based on self-reports of skills, were more likely to think they might take an upgrading program in the next five years. Membership in one or more high need groups has a much more modest impact on likelihood of having considered upgrading at any point since leaving school (compare Table 4.19 on page 62 with Table 4.35 below). Those with high need in even one skill area are almost twice as likely to expect to take upgrading in the next five years as those who are not high need. In contrast, being high need in one or even two skill areas only slightly increases the likelihood of having considered a program sometime since leaving school. Even among those who are not high need in any skill area, over half have considered upgrading or high school completion at some point.

TABLE 4.35 Since leaving school, thought about taking an upgrading program by number of basic skills areas self-rated poor, or self-rated moderate (with help required)

	Since leaving school, thought about taking a program					
Number of basic skill areas self-rated poor, or self-rated moderate (with help required)	Yes		No		Total	
	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%
None	279	54.4	234	45.6	**513**	**100.0**
One	144	62.6	86	37.4	**230**	**100.0**
Two	52	62.7	31	37.3	**83**	**100.0**
Three	28	70.0	12	30.0	**40**	**100.0**

When we look at the impact of high need in particular skill areas we find that only those who both rate their skills as poor and report that they ask others for help appear exceptionally likely to have thought about upgrading. Even among those who rate their skills as excellent, over half had considered upgrading at some point. Table 4.36 on page 82 shows these patterns for writing skills, but similar results are found for reading and math.

TABLE 4.36 Since leaving school, thought about taking an upgrading program by self-reported writing skills

	Since leaving school, thought about taking a program					
	Yes		No		Total	
Writing skills	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%
Excellent	57	54.3	48	45.7	**105**	**100.0**
Good	187	56.7	143	43.3	**330**	**100.0**
Moderate	145	57.8	106	42.2	**251**	**100.0**
Group	**389**	**56.7**	**297**	**43.3**	**686**	**100.0**
Moderate, ask for help with reading	34	64.2	19	35.8	**53**	**100.0**
Poor	36	49.3	37.0	50.7	**73**	**100.0**
Poor, ask for help with reading	41	82.0	9.0	18.0	**50**	**100.0**
Group	**111**	**63.1**	**65**	**36.9**	**176**	**100.0**

Membership in a high need group is then, a poor predictor of whether interviewees have at some point considered taking an upgrading program, but a much better predictor of whether, once having considered a program, they sustain that interest. Table 4.37 on page 83 shows that those who are high need in at least one skill area are much more likely to still be considering taking a program than those who are not high need. Among interviewees who are not high need, half of those who once considered a program do not expect to take one in the next five years. Persisters and Discontinuers each represent about 28 per cent of the category. In the case of interviewees with high need in one skill area, over two thirds of those who considered upgrading at any point still expect to take a program in the next five years. Persisters outnumber Discontinuers 46 per cent to 22 per cent.

We find a similar pattern when we look at results for individual skill areas. Table 4.38 on page 83 shows results for writing.

TABLE 4.37 Distribution of Persisters and Discontinuers by high need

	Since leaving school, thought about taking a program/ Expect to take program in next five years						
	Persisters Yes/*Yes-Maybe*		Discontinuers Yes/*No*		No/*No*		
Number of basic skill areas self-rated poor, or self-rated moderate (with help required)	**Count**	**%**	**Count**	**%**	**Count**	**%**	**Total**
None	131	27.6	132	27.8	211	44.5	**474**
One	97	46.2	46	21.9	67	31.9	**210**
Two	39	52.7	13	17.6	22	29.7	**74**
Three	17	44.7	10	26.3	11	28.9	**38**

TABLE 4.38 Since leaving school, thought about taking an upgrading program by self-reported writing skills

	Since leaving school, thought about taking a program/Expect to take program in next five years						
	Persisters Yes/*Yes-Maybe*		Discontinuers Yes/*No*		No/*No*		Total[1]
Writing skills	**Count**	**%**	**Count**	**%**	**Count**	**%**	
Excellent	27	26.7	27	26.7	47	46.5	**101**
Good	101	33.3	78	25.7	124	40.9	**303**
Moderate	75	32.8	66	28.8	88	38.4	**229**
Group	**203**	**32.1**	**171**	**27.0**	**259**	**40.9**	**633**
Moderate, ask for help with reading	22	47.8	10	21.7	14	30.4	**46**
Poor	29	44.6	6	9.2	30	46.2	**65**
Poor, ask for help with reading	28	58.3	13	27.1	7	14.6	**48**
Group	**79**	**49.7**	**29**	**18.2**	**51**	**32.1**	**159**

[1] The table excludes those who did not give a definite answer to either question, and those who indicate they had not thought of taking a program since leaving school but expected to enrol in the next five years.

If high need encourages a persistent, active interest in upgrading, this is even more the case when there is a specific objective in mind. As shown in Table 4.39 below, over 80 per cent of those who have considered taking a college or university program over the past five years and think they would need upgrading to do so, are Persisters.

TABLE 4.39 Continuity in interest in taking upgrading by expectation of taking an upgrading program

Thought about entering college or university	Would need upgrading beforehand	Since leaving school, thought about taking a program/ Expect to take program in next five years						
		Persisters Yes/*Yes-Maybe*		Discontinuers Yes/*No*		No/*No*		Total
		Count	%	Count	%	Count	%	
No	**No**	19	18.6	33	32.4	50	49.0	**102**
Yes	**No**	18	41.9	14	32.6	11	25.6	**43**
No	**Yes**	127	28.2	128	28.4	196	43.5	**451**
Yes	**Yes**	110	81.5	19	14.1	6	4.4	**135**
Total		**274**	**37.5**	**194**	**26.5**	**263**	**36.0**	**731**

About 40 per cent of our interviewees reported that they had not considered taking an upgrading program at any time since leaving school. Fewer than half of interviewees who have at some point considered upgrading, report that they are still interested enough to think they might actually enrol in the next five years.

Knowing how interviewees assess their own skills does not enable us to predict whether they have at any point considered a program. High need is, however, useful in predicting whether an interest in upgrading, once aroused, is sustained. Among those we have identified as high need based on self-reports, the proportion of Persisters rises to two thirds. In other words, interviewees acutely aware of weaknesses in basic skills are significantly more likely to have an active continuing interest in taking programs. When a specific objective like entering postsecondary education is added, the proportion of Persisters is even higher. However, why then have they not enrolled? In the next section, we explore this question.

CHAPTER 5

WEIGHING UP PROSPECTS: DIVERSIONARY AND INTERVENING FACTORS

Our survey asked about factors influencing participation at three different points. First, we wanted to know why people had left school before graduation. Second, we asked about the reasons interviewees had either not thought of taking upgrading or had thought about it but not enrolled. Finally, we asked a detailed set of questions about disincentives to enrolling in a program in the near future.

Reasons for not enrolling in an upgrading program since leaving school

The impact of high need

Interviewees who reported that they had considered taking an upgrading program were asked why they had not done so. Those who indicated that they had not considered upgrading since leaving school were asked why this was the case. Table 5.1 on page 86 reports results for both categories, with a breakdown by membership in a high need group.

TABLE 5.1 Reason for not enrolling in an upgrading program by high need status

	At least one skill area self-rated poor, or self-rated moderate (with help required)					
	No		Yes		All	
	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%
Yes - Have considered taking a program?						
Work-related	75	26.9	68	30.5	**143**	**28.5**
Family-related	52	18.6	28	12.6	**80**	**15.9**
Work and family	19	6.8	12	5.4	**31**	**6.2**
Financial	16	5.7	12	5.4	**28**	**5.6**
No time	18	6.5	15	6.7	**33**	**6.6**
Too difficult/Dislike/Fear	15	5.4	19	8.5	**34**	**6.8**
No perceived interest	47	16.8	36	16.1	**83**	**16.5**
Other	13	4.7	25	11.2	**38**	**7.6**
Don't know	24	8.6	8	3.6	**32**	**6.4**
Total	**279**	**100.0**	**223**	**100.0**	**502**	**100.0**
No - Have considered taking a program?						
Work-related	44	18.7	30	23.3	**74**	**20.3**
Family-related	21	8.9	18	14.0	**39**	**10.7**
Work and family	12	5.1	10	7.8	**22**	**6.0**
Financial	2	0.9	5	3.9	**7**	**1.9**
No time	12	5.1	4	3.1	**16**	**4.4**
Too difficult/Dislike/Fear	13	5.5	12	9.3	**25**	**6.9**
No perceived interest	102	43.4	32	24.8	**134**	**36.8**
Other	9	3.8	9	7.0	**18**	**4.9**
Don't know	20	8.5	9	7.0	**29**	**8.0**
Total	**235**	**100.0**	**129**	**100.0**	**364**	**100.0**

There are four important patterns in these results. First, looking only at the results for those who have considered a program since leaving school, we find that the reasons for not enrolling are similar for both high need individuals and those who are not high need. Second, for both groups work-related factors are cited most often, and socioeconomic/circumstantial factors in general (work, family, finances) represent more than half of responses, outstripping cognitive-emotive factors (dislike/fear, lack of interest) by a very wide margin.

Third, in the case of interviewees who have not considered taking a program, being high need makes a great deal of difference. The factors that the high need group cites for not considering a program are very similar to those cited for not enrolling in a program by those who considered it. The main difference is that high need interviewees who did not consider a program are somewhat more likely to report lack of interest as the main reason (25 versus 16 per cent) and correspondingly less likely to cite socioeconomic/circumstantial or 'other' reasons. Fourth, those who are not high need and have not considered upgrading differ from all other groups in the large proportion - over 40 per cent - who cite lack of interest as the main reason. This is the only group for whom socioeconomic/circumstantial factors do not make up the majority of responses.

We conclude that among the high need group, those who considered upgrading and those who did not are probably very similar in terms of motivation. Both faced mainly socioeconomic/circumstantial challenges and are distinguished mainly by how far along they got in thinking about improving their skills before these factors took priority. In the case of those who are not high need the situation is different. Those who do not report considering a program are more likely to simply lack interest compared to those who have thought about upgrading.

Here again, we see both the importance and the limitations of explaining orientations to upgrading in terms of self-reported needs. Among those who have considered upgrading, reasons for not enrolling are not related to high need. However, among those who do not report considering a program, the high need group is more frequently constrained by socioeconomic/ circumstantial factors; the non-high need group, by lack of interest.

The impact of age and sex

Age is also related to the reasons interviewees gave for not pursuing a program. One's work situation can be both an incentive for (in terms of upgrading needs) and a conflict to taking an upgrading program (in the form of time constraints, for example). As work-related factors in older age groups are less important as a reason for taking upgrading, so too work-related factors are less important as a reason for not enrolling in a program (Table 5.2 below). Conversely, lack of interest is more often cited among older age groups, particularly those 50 to 64. There are no substantial systematic differences for other types of reasons.

TABLE 5.2 Reasons for not taking/considering an upgrading course since leaving school, by age grouping

Age Group	18-29		30-49		50-64		65+	
Reasons	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%
Work-related	51	35.2	86	25.0	57	20.8	23	23.0
Family-related	27	18.6	41	11.9	32	11.7	18	18.0
Work and family	4	2.8	23	6.7	15	5.5	11	11.0
Financial	3	2.8	20	5.8	8	2.9	3	3.0
No time	9	6.2	21	6.1	10	3.6	6	6.0
Too difficult/ Dislike/ Fear	10	6.9	23	6.7	21	7.7	5	5.0
No perceived interest	20	13.8	82	23.8	91	33.2	23	23.0
Other	12	8.3	15	4.4	23	8.4	7	7.0
Don't know	8	5.5	33	9.6	17	6.2	4	4.0
Total	**145**	**100.**	**344**	**100.**	**274**	**100.**	**100**	**100.**

Over 20 per cent of the women interviewees under 30 indicated that they left school for reasons of marriage and child-bearing. No male in this age group (and only three over the whole sample) cited marriage as a reason for leaving school. Family responsibilities become an important theme in women's subsequent reasons for not taking upgrading programs.

Men who have considered upgrading since leaving school most frequently cite two reasons for not doing so. The first is work-related factors; the second, a lapse of interest on their own part (see Table 5.3 on page 90). Together these reasons account for over 60 per cent of responses. For women, work and family-related reasons are the two leading factors, representing over half of responses. While lack of interest is cited by over a quarter of men who considered upgrading at one time, less than 10 per cent of women offered this as a reason for not enrolling.

TABLE 5.3 Reason for not enrolling in an upgrading program, by sex

	Female		Male		All	
	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%
Yes - Have considered taking a program?						
Work-related	64	25.9	80	35.7	**144**	**30.6**
Family-related	77	31.2	3	1.3	**80**	**17.0**
Work and family	23	9.3	8	3.6	**31**	**6.6**
Financial	12	4.9	17	7.6	**29**	**6.2**
No time	10	4.0	22	9.8	**32**	**6.8**
Too difficult/Dislike/Fear	18	7.3	16	7.1	**34**	**7.2**
No perceived interest	21	8.5	62	27.7	**83**	**17.6**
Other	22	8.9	16	7.1	**38**	**8.1**
Total	**247**	**100.0**	**224**	**100.0**	**471**	**100.0**
No - Have considered taking a program?						
Work-related	33	19.5	41	25.0	**74**	**22.2**
Family-related	37	21.9	1	0.6	**38**	**11.4**
Work and family	15	8.9	7	4.3	**22**	**6.6**
Financial	4	2.4	2	1.2	**6**	**1.8**
No time	7	4.1	9	5.5	**16**	**4.8**
Too difficult/Dislike/Fear	17	10.1	8	4.9	**25**	**7.5**
No perceived interest	47	27.8	87	53.0	**134**	**40.2**
Other	9	5.3	9	5.5	**18**	**5.4**
Total	**169**	**100.0**	**164**	**100.0**	**333**	**100.0**

We find a similar contrast among those who stated that they had not considering upgrading. Over half of men but just over a quarter of women cite lack of interest as the main reason. About 20 per cent of both men and women offered work-related reasons. However, over 20 per cent of women cited family-related factors compared to less than one per cent of men.

The need to safeguard employment income is a major barrier to taking an upgrading program for both women and men. Beyond this commonality, women face the additional constraint of family responsibilities. It is worth noting that family responsibilities are cited by women in all age groups: by 35 per cent of those under 30, 29 per cent of those 30 to 49, 22 per cent of those 50 to 64 and 30 per cent of those 65 and older. Of course, if family responsibilities were lessened, it is quite possible that women would not increase their participation rates in upgrading but, like men, would report a lapse in interest as the reason for not enrolling.

Table 5.4 below shows the distribution of reasons for not taking upgrading for Persisters and Discontinuers (as well as those who had never considered a program). With the exception of the higher proportion of Discontinuers citing lack of interest, there are no substantial differences in the reasons cited by Persisters and Discontinuers.

TABLE 5.4 Reason for not enrolling in an upgrading program: Persisters and Discontinuers

	Since leaving school, considered taking a program/ expect to take program in next five years							
	Persisters *Y/Y-Maybe*		Discontinuers *Y/N*		*N/N*		Total	
	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%
Work-related	90	31.8	51	25.2	62	19.9	**203**	**25.5**
Family-related	44	15.5	30	14.9	32	10.3	**106**	**13.3**
Work /Family	16	5.7	14	6.9	17	5.5	**47**	**5.9**
Financial	14	4.9	13	6.4	4	1.3	**31**	**3.9**
No time	18	6.4	12	5.9	14	4.5	**44**	**5.5**
Too difficult/Dislike/Fear	20	7.1	13	6.4	21	6.8	**54**	**6.8**
No perceived interest	36	12.7	46	22.8	124	39.9	**206**	**25.9**
Other	23	8.1	13	6.4	14	4.5	**50**	**6.3**
Don't know	22	7.8	10	5.0	23	7.4	**55**	**6.9**
Total	**283**	**100**	**202**	**100**	**311**	**100**	**796**	**100**

Barriers to schooling: continuity in reasons for early school leaving and nonparticipation in upgrading

We suggested earlier that some reasons for an interest in upgrading programs might be more enduring than others, and thus be more likely to lead to a sustained interest in enrolling. We were unable to investigate this directly. The survey data does, however, allow us to investigate broad continuities between the reasons interviewees left school initially and the reasons they have not enrolled in upgrading programs in the interim. Table 5.5 on page 93 presents the pattern of responses.

We find, in fact, considerable continuity in interviewees' reasons for initially leaving school and then not pursuing an upgrading program. Among those who cite work-related reasons for not taking an upgrading course, over 40 per cent indicate they left school to start work, and a further 15 per cent cite money problems and family responsibilities which may have propelled them into the labour force. Similarly, almost half (45 per cent) of those who cite family reasons for not taking upgrading, left school either for reasons of marriage or money problems that might reflect family responsibilities. In contrast, a majority those who cite fear of failure or dislike of school as reasons for not enrolling in an upgrading program left school for the same reasons (38 per cent) or because they had lost interest (15 per cent).

We should not, however, overstate the degree of continuity. Among those who cite work and/or family as the main reason they have not pursued upgrading, between a quarter and a third offer cognitive-emotive factors (and school failure) for leaving school before graduation. Similarly, 40 per cent of those who indicate that fear of failure or a dislike of school has kept them from enrolling in an upgrading program, left school for socioeconomic/circumstantial reasons (work, family or finances).

TABLE 5.5 Why didn't take/think about upgrading by the main reason you left high school before graduation

Why didn't take upgrading	Main reason you left high school Started work		Marriage/family		Money problems/ family responsibilities		Disliked/ Poor grades/ learning disability/ streamed		No interest		Other/ Not stated		Total	
	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%	Count	
Work-related	92	42.6	5	2.3	33	15.3	35	16.2	17	7.9	34	15.7	**216**	**100.0**
Family-related	16	13.4	24	20.2	29	24.4	28	23.5	13	10.9	9	7.6	**119**	**100.0**
Work and family	10	18.5	7	13.0	13	24.1	13	24.1	5	9.3	6	11:2	**54**	**100.0**
Financial	6	17.6	2	5.9	7	20.6	7	20.6	4	11.8	8	23.5	**34**	**100.0**
No time	10	20.8	3	6.3	7	14.6	13	27.1	4	8.3	11	23.0	**48**	**100.0**
Too difficult/ Dislike/Fear	15	25.0	3	5.0	6	10.0	23	38.3	9	15.0	4	6.7	**60**	**100.0**
No perceived interest	66	30.7	2	0.9	31	14.4	57	26.5	35	16.3	24	11.2	**215**	**100.0**
Other	11	19.0	4	6.9	11	19.0	20	34.5	3	5.2	9	15.5	**58**	**100.0**
Don't know	16	26.2	3	4.9	3	4.9	11	18.0	1	1.6	27	44.3	**61**	**100.0**
All	**242**	**28.0**	**53**	**6.1**	**140**	**16.2**	**207**	**23.9**	**91**	**10.5**	**132**	**15.3**	**865**	**100.0**

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Current concerns in thinking about taking upgrading programs

Interviewees were asked a more detailed set of closed-ended questions dealing with their concerns in thinking about the idea of taking an upgrading program. All interviewees were asked about this, regardless of whether they currently thought they might take a program within the next five years, or reported any interest in taking a program.

The question set required interviewees to rate their level of concern about 21 potential difficulties they felt they would encounter when taking an upgrading program (on a seven-point scale from not at all concerned to extremely concerned). These concerns fall into three broad categories: socioeconomic/circumstantial factors, cognitive-emotive factors, and program/policy factors. While we have applied the first two headings to options used in earlier questions, it should be kept in mind that the issues are often different in the current question.

Socioeconomic/circumstantial factors, as earlier, include work, family responsibilities, and finances. New topics include no support from the family and physical proximity to where the program is offered. The cognitive-emotive category previously included items about interviewees' interest in programs and emotional reactions to schooling. In this section, cognitive-emotive items mainly deal with being worried or nervous about taking a program, fears of embarrassment, fears that others will not be friendly and accepting, and concerns about being too old to fit in or to learn. Finally, the new category of program/policy factors mainly covers items on how programs are organized. These include concerns that programs will be too rigid, that there will not be enough one-to-one attention, that students will not be able to work at their own pace, or that the program will be at too difficult a level.

Table 5.6 on page 96 summarizes the concerns of those who indicated that they might take a program within the next few years. Table 5.7 on page 99 is based on the responses of Discontinuers; Table 5.8 on page 102 includes responses for all interviewees. In each table, the 21 areas of concern are sorted by the median rating offered by interviewees. (The median is the midpoint in the distribution of ratings, that is, half the responses are above it, and half are below.) The higher the median score, the greater the level of concern about the factor involved. Where median scores are the same, areas of concern are additionally sorted by the percentage of rating that lie above the mid-point of our scale, that is the proportion of 5, 6, and 7 ratings where 7 is extremely concerned. Finally, the different types of concerns (socioeconomic/circumstantial, program/policy, and cognitive-emotive) are distinguished by different levels of shading.

TABLE 5.6 Concerns when thinking about the idea of attending a program: interviewees who say they might attend a program in the next 5 years

	Not at all concerned			Moderately concerned			Extremely concerned			
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Total of 5.6 & 7	Median	Count
	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%		
Money problems in general	18.0	7.2	4.7	17.0	11.0	8.4	33.8	**53.2**	5.0	209
Program might conflict with your job	28.8	7.8	4.8	19.0	9.1	10.6	19.9	**39.5**	4.0	204
The program might be too far away	26.5	10.7	5.9	21.1	7.9	8.2	19.8	**35.8**	4.0	209
The program might take too long to complete	26.8	9.3	7.1	23.9	13.2	7.5	12.2	**32.9**	4.0	208
The program might be too difficult	25.6	14.4	7.3	22.1	14.3	5.9	10.5	**30.7**	4.0	209
Skills you learn in program might not be related to your work	27.1	11.0	9.8	23.2	10.5	5.5	12.9	**28.9**	4.0	203
You might not be able to work at your own pace	28.7	8.1	11.0	25.6	8.7	9.7	8.2	**26.6**	4.0	209
Difficulties arranging childcare for your children	42.9	6.7	3.3	6.8	6.5	5.2	28.6	**40.3**	3.0	147
You would feel worried or nervous about taking a program	29.8	11.3	9.5	19.3	13.6	5.3	11.2	**30.1**	3.0	209

TABLE 5.6 **Concerns when thinking about the idea of attending a program: interviewees who say they might attend a program in the next 5 years (cont.)**

	Not at all concerned			Moderately concerned			Extremely concerned			
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Total of 5,6 & 7	Median	Count
	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%		
The transportation would cost too much	37.3	10.9	8.0	14.5	9.0	4.1	16.2	**29.4**	3.0	209
You might not get enough one-on-one attention	32.9	8.7	11.6	19.4	9.5	8.2	9.6	**27.4**	3.0	208
The program might be too rigid and structured	24.5	10.1	15.7	24.3	10.1	4.1	11.2	**25.5**	3.0	209
The program might not be relevant to your daily life	30.9	13.5	11.9	23.9	7.0	3.9	9.0	**19.8**	3.0	206
You might be older than other students in the program	45.9	12.2	7.3	10.8	9.3	3.2	11.3	**23.8**	2.0	208
Teacher might not be friendly	45.4	10.7	8.2	14.5	8.8	4.3	8.1	**21.2**	2.0	208
You might not be treated as an adult	48.8	12.3	5.1	15.5	5.0	5.0	8.3	**18.3**	2.0	209
You might feel embarrassed in the program	43.6	13.1	11.1	16.3	5.6	2.1	8.2	**15.9**	2.0	209

TABLE 5.6 Concerns when thinking about the idea of attending a program: interviewees who say they might attend a program in the next 5 years (cont.)

	Not at all concerned			Moderately concerned			Extremely concerned			
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Total of 5,6 & 7	Median	Count
	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%		
You think it might be too late for you to learn	58.6	11.1	4.9	9.9	7.1	3.4	5.0	**15.5**	1.0	208
Your family members might not be supportive	66.1	8.3	5.3	7.6	3.2	2.9	6.6	**12.6**	1.0	209
The other students might not be friendly	53.2	8.7	10.4	15.7	5.3	0.8	6.0	**12.1**	1.0	209
You might feel embarrassed if family, friends, co-workers knew	67.0	10.5	6.7	9.4	2.6	1.4	2.5	**6.4**	1.0	208

Legend:

	Socioeconomic/ circumstantial factors		Program/policy related factors		Cognitive-emotive factors

TABLE 5.7 **Concerns when thinking about the idea of taking a program: Discontinuers**

	Not at all concerned			Moderately concerned			Extremely concerned			
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Total of 5,6 & 7	Median	Count
	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%		
Money problems in general	22.3	6.4	6.3	17.7	8.2	10.2	28.9	**47.3**	4.0	200
Program might conflict with your job	34.7	4.5	1.8	14.9	12.1	10.5	21.4	**44.1**	4.0	186
The program might be too far away	30.9	7.2	7.4	16.2	11.7	6.4	20.2	**38.3**	4.0	198
You might not be able to work at your own pace	18.6	3.6	13.3	28.2	10.2	10.8	15.2	**36.3**	4.0	200
The program might be too difficult	24.6	6.3	7.4	26.4	11.8	5.4	18.1	**35.2**	4.0	200
Skills you learn in program might not be related to your work	25.3	9.2	7.8	22.5	11.1	9.3	14.8	**35.2**	4.0	191
The program might take too long to complete	26.1	6.6	9.8	23.9	11.5	9.1	13.1	**33.7**	4.0	200

TABLE 5.7 Concerns when thinking about the idea of taking a program: Discontinuers (cont.)

	Not at all concerned			Moderately concerned			Extremely concerned			
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Total of 5,6 & 7	Median	Count
	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%		
You would feel worried or nervous about taking a program	32.2	7.6	6.0	21.6	10.9	5.9	15.8	**32.5**	4.0	201
The program might not be relevant to your daily life	29.4	7.4	8.6	23.6	9.5	5.4	16.1	**31.0**	4.0	198
The program might be too rigid and structured	27.5	8.5	7.6	30.5	8.1	8.6	9.3	**26.0**	4.0	200
You think it might be too late for you to learn	38.6	8.2	4.5	13.8	10.3	8.4	16.2	**34.9**	3.0	200
You might not get enough one-on-one attention	30.5	10.1	11.3	20.7	13.0	3.1	11.3	**27.5**	3.0	196
The transportation would cost too much	42.4	10.2	3.5	15.7	6.3	3.8	18.1	**28.2**	2.0	199
You might feel embarrassed in the program	49.7	10.5	5.8	12.7	9.1	1.8	10.4	**21.3**	2.0	200
Teacher might not be friendly	49.6	12.5	7.4	19.3	7.3	1.7	2.2	**11.1**	2.0	199
Difficulties arranging childcare for your children	69.3	2.2	1.8	4.1	3.2	4.7	14.8	**22.7**	1.0	130
You might be older than other students in the program	51.9	5.0	5.9	14.7	8.7	4.7	9.1	**22.5**	1.0	201
You might not be treated as an adult	58.1	11.0	10.3	9.2	2.2	0.9	8.3	**11.4**	1.0	200

TABLE 5.7 Concerns when thinking about the idea of taking a program: Discontinuers (cont.)

	Not at all concerned			Moderately concerned			Extremely concerned			
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Total of 5,6 & 7	Median	Count
	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%		
The other students might not be friendly	58.5	12.1	9.1	12.4	2.4	2.6	2.9	**7.9**	1.0	198
Your family members might not be supportive	73.4	6.8	4.4	9.2	1.2	1.5	3.6	**6.2**	1.0	198
You might feel embarrassed if family, friends, co-workers knew	78.4	8.6	3.5	7.1	1.2	0.2	1.0	**2.4**	1.0	201

Legend:

	Socioeconomic/circumstantial factors		**Program/policy related factors**		**Cognitive-emotive factors**

TABLE 5.8 Concerns when thinking about the idea of taking a program: all interviewees

	Not at all concerned			Moderately concerned			Extremely concerned			
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Total of 5,6 & 7	Median	Count
	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%		
Money problems in general	20.7	6.4	6.6	16.4	10.7	9.6	29.6	**49.9**	4.0	864
Program might conflict with your job	34.5	5.7	4.4	15.9	10.4	10.6	18.6	**39.6**	4.0	822
The program might be too far away	27.6	6.9	7.0	19.6	9.8	8.4	20.6	**38.9**	4.0	859
The program might be too difficult	21.0	8.5	8.9	24.1	13.3	7.5	16.7	**37.4**	4.0	864
You might not be able to work at your own pace	21.9	5.7	10.5	25.4	12.1	10.9	13.4	**36.5**	4.0	858
You would feel worried or nervous about taking a program	29.2	9.1	9.3	18.9	12.6	6.7	14.3	**33.6**	4.0	863
The program might take too long to complete	26.9	8.1	8.1	23.3	13.2	8.1	12.3	**33.6**	4.0	860
The program might be too rigid and structured	22.6	7.5	12.4	25.3	13.5	6.7	11.9	**32.2**	4.0	858
Skills you learn in program might not be related to your work	28.9	9.8	9.8	22.7	10.0	6.9	11.9	**28.8**	4.0	829
The program might not be relevant to your daily life	27.2	9.7	10.7	24.0	10.3	5.8	12.3	**28.4**	4.0	848
The transportation would cost too much	35.8	8.2	7.8	13.6	10.2	6.5	17.8	**34.6**	3.0	862
You might not get enough one-on-one attention	29.2	10.2	11.8	21.1	11.7	5.9	10.1	**27.7**	3.0	856

TABLE 5.8 **Concerns when thinking about the idea of taking a program: all interviewees (cont.)**

	Not at all concerned			Moderately concerned			Extremely concerned			
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Total of 5,6 & 7	Median	Count
	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%		
You think it might be too late for you to learn	44.2	10.3	5.8	11.7	8.7	6.3	13.0	**28.0**	2.0	863
You might be older than other students in the program	46.9	9.5	7.4	12.7	7.4	4.7	11.4	**23.5**	2.0	864
You might feel embarrassed in the program	44.6	10.4	9.2	15.8	7.4	3.1	9.5	**19.9**	2.0	861
Teacher might not be friendly	44.2	12.8	8.7	16.0	7.5	4.6	6.2	**18.3**	2.0	862
Difficulties arranging childcare for your children	58.1	4.4	3.8	7.2	4.9	3.5	18.1	**26.5**	1.0	556
You might not be treated as an adult	51.2	11.7	7.5	12.9	4.9	3.0	8.8	**16.8**	1.0	865
The other students might not be friendly	51.6	10.7	10.0	15.8	4.3	2.6	4.9	**11.8**	1.0	863
Your family members might not be supportive	67.1	10.7	5.4	6.9	3.5	2.0	4.3	**9.8**	1.0	858
You might feel embarrassed if family, friends, co-workers knew	71.9	10.5	5.1	6.7	2.4	1.2	2.2	**5.9**	1.0	863

Legend:

☐	**Socioeconomic/circumstantial factors**	☐	**Program/policy related factors**	☐	**Cognitive-emotive factors**

The most immediately obvious feature of all three tables is that there is a consistent hierarchy of concerns. Socioeconomic/circumstantial and program/policy-related concerns generally have higher median ratings than cognitive-emotive concerns. The latter dominate the lower third of each table. The two most highly ranked concerns in each table are socioeconomic: money problems in general, and concern that taking an upgrading program might conflict with paid employment. These are followed by a concern that programs might be too far away. (This does not seem to be a cost concern since median ratings of concern with transportation costs ranked lower.)

The next highly ranked set of concerns is associated with program/policy-related factors. These include concerns about program length, level of difficulty and not being able to work at one's own pace, and the relevance of what the programs would deliver. At the lower end of this set of program/policy-related factors is the sole cognitive-emotive factor ranked highly in all three tables: a general nervousness about taking a program. In this middle third of ranked concerns, interviewees who currently expect to take a program within the next five years differ from Discontinuers. Among those who anticipate taking a program, access to childcare is an important concern with 40 per cent of respondents who rated this item (50 less than most other items) offering ratings of 5, 6 or 7. Among Discontinuers, this item has a median rating of 1, meaning that at least half of respondents made the lowest possible rating. On the other hand, among Discontinuers, concern that it might be too late for them to learn has a median of 3 and over a third offer ratings of 5, 6, or 7. Among those currently anticipating taking a program in the next five years, this concern has a median rating of 1.

For both those expecting to take programs and for Discontinuers, cognitive-emotive factors fill out most of the bottom third of each table. Concerns include fears of embarrassment, worries about not being treated as an adult, and uncertainties as to whether teachers and other students would be friendly. All of these areas receive median ratings of 1 or 2.

Age, sex, household status and current concerns about taking a program

Do interviewees at different ages have distinct concerns, currently, about what it would mean to take an upgrading program? In particular, do we find concerns become more generalized and/or more serious moving from younger to older age groups? The results presented in Table 5.9 below suggest that age differences are, in fact, confined to quite specific issues. Moreover, there is little indication that older respondents' growing reluctance to undertake programs is due to increasing concerns about what participation would mean.

TABLE 5.9 Concerns when thinking about the idea of attending a program, by age group

Concerns	Age group							
	18-29		30-49		50-64		65+	
	Median	Count	Median	Count	Median	Count	Median	Count
Difficulties arranging childcare for your children	5.9	95	1.0	264	1.0	150	1.0	44
Money problems in general	5.0	145	5.0	345	4.0	271	4.0	99
Program might conflict with your job	5.0	142	4.0	336	2.0	256	1.0	86
The program might take too long to complete	4.0	145	4.0	342	4.0	269	4.0	99
The program might be too far away	4.0	145	4.0	342	4.0	268	4.0	100
You might not be able to work at your own pace	4.0	145	4.0	343	4.0	267	4.0	99
The program might not be relevant to your daily life	4.0	145	3.9	337	4.0	266	3.0	96
Skills you learn in program might not be related to your work	4.0	143	4.0	334	3.0	256	3.0	93
The program might be too difficult	3.0	145	4.0	345	4.0	273	4.0	98

TABLE 5.9 Concerns when thinking about the idea of attending a program, by age group (cont.)

Concerns	Age group							
	18-29		30-49		50-64		65+	
	Median	Count	Median	Count	Median	Count	Median	Count
The program might be too rigid and structured	3.0	144	4.0	344	4.0	269	4.0	98
You might not get enough one-on-one attention	3.0	145	3.0	338	4.0	271	3.0	98
The transportation would cost too much	2.0	145	3.0	344	3.2	270	4.0	100
You would feel worried or nervous about taking a program	2.0	145	4.0	342	4.0	273	4.0	100
Teacher might not be friendly	2.0	145	2.0	344	2.0	270	2.0	99
You think it might be too late for you to learn	1.0	145	2.0	344	4.0	271	3.6	99
You might feel embarrassed in the program	1.0	145	2.0	344	2.0	269	2.6	99
You might be older than other students in the program	1.0	145	2.0	345	3.0	272	2.0	98
The other students might not be friendly	1.0	145	1.0	343	2.0	272	2.0	99
Your family members might not be supportive	1.0	145	1.0	340	1.0	270	1.0	100
You might feel embarrassed if family, friends, co-workers knew	1.0	144	1.0	345	1.0	273	1.0	98
You might not be treated as an adult	1.0	145	1.0	345	2.0	272	1.0	99

Younger interviewees, those under 30, are more focused in their concerns than older age groups. The leading concern of those under 30 is arranging for childcare; for other age groups this concern barely registers at all. The median rating for daycare is 5.9 for those under 30, and 1.0 for all other age groups (where 1 is not at all concerned, 4 is moderately concerned and 7 is extremely concerned). Those under 30 are also very concerned about whether taking upgrading would conflict with their jobs. This is also an important concern for those 30-49, but of little importance to those over 50. Older respondents are much more likely to worry that it might be too late for them to learn than are those under 50. However, this factor does not stand out, even for those over 65, in the same way that daycare does for the under 30 group; it is one of several factors registering the same level of concern. Interestingly, being older than other students in a program is not especially prevalent among the 65 and over group. It is a relatively low-level concern in all age groups except those under 30, though somewhat more highly rated by interviewees 50-64.

As has been mentioned throughout the previous section, women are as likely as men to have considered taking an upgrading program since they left school, and for similar reasons. Women are as likely as men to have thought, within the past five years, about taking a college or university program, about as likely to think they would need to do upgrading beforehand, as apt as men to say they expect to take an upgrading program within the next five years, and are very like men when it comes to the motivation for taking programs. Where they differ is in the reasons they give for not doing so.

We find few differences between women and men regarding their current concerns about taking an upgrading program (see Table 5.10 on page 108) with a few exceptions: women are somewhat more concerned than men about money problems (in general and with respect to the cost of transportation); and women are somewhat more concerned about feeling nervous, not getting enough attention, being older than other students, finding friendly teachers and students, and not being treated as an adult.

TABLE 5.10 Concerns when thinking about the idea of attending a program, by sex

Concerns	Female		Male	
	Median	Count	Median	Count
Money problems in general	5.00	451	4.00	413
The program might take too long to complete	4.00	448	4.00	411
The program might not be relevant to your daily life	4.00	444	4.00	403
The program might be too far away	4.00	448	4.00	410
The transportation would cost too much	4.00	450	3.00	412
Program might conflict with your job	4.00	420	4.00	403
Skills you learn in program might not be related to your work	4.00	430	4.00	399
You would feel worried or nervous about taking a program	4.00	451	3.00	412
The program might be too difficult	4.00	451	4.00	413
The program might be too rigid and structured	4.00	448	4.00	411
You might not get enough one-on-one attention	4.00	444	3.00	412
You might not be able to work at your own pace	4.00	448	4.00	410
You might be older than other students in the program	3.00	452	1.00	412
Teacher might not be friendly	2.00	450	1.00	412
The other students might not be friendly	2.00	449	1.00	414
You might feel embarrassed in the program	2.00	447	2.00	414
You might not be treated as an adult	2.00	450	1.00	415
You think it might be too late for you to learn	2.00	450	2.00	414
Difficulties arranging childcare for your children	1.00	296	1.00	260
Your family members might not be supportive	1.00	450	1.00	408
You might feel embarrassed if family, friends, co-workers knew	1.00	452	1.00	412

Childcare concerns are limited to those respondents, women and men, who have young children at home. We cannot strictly identify this group from the survey results, but we can identify those who listed children, age unspecified, as members of their household.

Table 5.11 below shows the proportion of interviewees who expect to take upgrading in the next five years by gender and household status, for households including children. The results are somewhat counter-intuitive. Female single parents are more than twice as likely as male parents in households with their spouse or partner to expect to enrol in a program within the next five years. In other words, expectations of taking a program are higher for those facing more barriers in terms of lack of family support and risk of poverty.

TABLE 5.11 Expectation of attending a course by selected household statuses

	Do you think you might take upgrading in the next 5 years?							
Household status	**Yes**		**Maybe**		**No**		**Total**	
Households with children	**Count**	**%**	**Count**	**%**	**Count**	**%**	**Count**	**%**
Female single parent	24	58.5	3	7.3	14	34.1	**41**	**100**
Female parent with partner	41	36.6	29	25.9	42	37.5	**112**	**100**
Male single parent	8	42.1	2	10.5	9	47.4	**19**	**100**
Male parent with partner	28	23.9	18	15.4	71	60.7	**117**	**100**

This is borne out by the concerns expressed about taking a program. Money problems in general are cited as a leading concern by virtually all groups we have examined. Among female single parents, however, this factor earns a median rating of 7, the top of the scale indicating extreme concern (see Table 5.12 on page 110). This group also has exceptionally high concerns about the program being too far away. On the issue of childcare, however, responses of women raising children on their own and those with partners is negligible. Median ratings for female parents are well above the mid-point of our rating scale (4.8 and 5); ratings for male parents, below the mid-point (3.1 and 2.0).

TABLE 5.12 Concerns when thinking about the idea of attending a program, by sex and household status

Concerns	Selected household status							
	Female single parent		Female parent with partner		Single male parent		Male parent with partner	
	Median	Count	Median	Count	Median	Count	Median	Count
Money problems in general	7.0	41	5.0	122	5.2	20	4.0	119
The program might be too far away	6.0	41	4.0	121	4.4	20	4.0	119
The transportation would cost too much	5.0	41	4.0	122	4.0	20	2.0	119
Difficulties arranging childcare for your children	4.8	40	5.0	115	3.1	12	2.0	115
You would feel worried or nervous about taking a program	4.0	41	4.0	122	3.0	20	3.0	118
You might not be able to work at your own pace	4.0	41	4.0	122	4.0	20	4.0	119
The program might be too rigid and structured	4.0	41	4.0	120	4.0	20	4.0	119
The program might be too difficult	4.0	41	4.0	122	4.0	20	3.8	119
Teacher might not be friendly	4.0	41	2.0	122	2.7	20	1.0	119
Program might conflict with your job	4.0	38	4.0	119	5.0	20	4.6	119
Skills you learn in program might not be related to your work	4.0	40	3.0	122	2.0	20	3.0	116
You might not get enough one-on-one attention	3.8	41	4.0	119	4.0	20	2.6	118
You might feel embarrassed in the program	3.1	41	2.0	121	2.0	20	1.1	119
The program might take too long to complete	3.0	41	4.0	122	5.0	20	4.0	119
The program might not be relevant to your daily life	3.0	41	4.0	119	4.0	20	3.4	115

TABLE 5.12 Concerns when thinking about the idea of attending a program, by sex and household status (cont.)

Concerns	Selected household status							
	Female single parent		Female parent with partner		Single male parent		Male parent with partner	
	Median	Count	Median	Count	Median	Count	Median	Count
You might be older than other students in the program	2.1	41	2.0	122	2.0	20	1.0	119
You might not be treated as an adult	2.0	41	1.0	122	2.0	20	1.0	119
The other students might not be friendly	2.0	41	1.0	122	2.0	20	1.0	119
Your family members might not be supportive	1.0	41	1.0	122	1.0	20	1.0	116
You think it might be too late for you to learn	1.0	41	1.0	121	3.0	20	2.0	119
You might feel embarrassed if family, friends, co-workers knew	1.0	41	1.0	122	1.0	20	1.0	119

It should be noted that for female parent groups, the median rating hides a pattern of polarized responses. Thus among female single parents, 40 per cent indicate that they are extremely concerned with childcare while 35 per cent are not at all concerned. There is a similar division among female parents with partners (31 versus 41 per cent). In the case of male single parents, only a quarter are extremely concerned compared to a third who are not at all concerned. It is, however, the large group of male parents with partners who differ most sharply from female parents. Only 16 per cent of this group indicated that they are extremely concerned about childcare while almost half, 47 per cent, indicate that they are not at all concerned. The polarization of responses among female parents likely reflects differences in the ages of children in the household. While this may be a factor in female/male differences (meaning the luck of the draw may have resulted in fewer males being parents of younger children), the lesser concern over childcare is consistent with socially-condoned sex role relationships.

Program preferences: location and format

In the previous section we looked at factors that tend to push interviewees away from upgrading: the concerns, fears and worries they had about taking a program. In this section we try to identify program characteristics that are most attractive to interviewees. These have to do with both program format and program location.

Program formats

Interviewees were asked to rate eight different program formats in terms of how interested they would be in taking upgrading in this way. Persisters, and others who expect to take an upgrading program in the next five years, show strong interest in a number of options; five of eight formats earn ratings of 5 or 6 (where 7 is extremely interested). Two options, however, stand out, receiving ratings of 7 from 40 per cent or more of prospective program entrants. These formats are studying one-on-one with a tutor and small group sessions of 5-10 students (see Table 5.13 on page 113). Large classes (15 students or more) are less popular earning a median rating of 4 (moderately interested) with a notable clustering of ratings in the middle categories. Learning through the Internet has a similarly modest median rating, but a very different, polarized distribution of ratings. Just under a third indicate that they are extremely interested in taking an upgrading program over the Internet; a similar number, 28 per cent, indicate that they are not at all interested in learning over the Internet. Of the distance education options, the traditional correspondence course receives the broadest support.

TABLE 5.13 Interest in program formats

	Not at all interested			Moderately interested			Extremely interested		
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Median	Count
Persisters/others who might take a program in next 5 years									
Studying independently at home through correspondence	21.1	6.3	5.2	14.0	14.4	11.7	27.4	5.0	209
A television course where you tune in or they send video	31.8	7.6	3.5	18.1	10.9	6.9	21.1	4.0	209
A program using the Internet to talk to instructor	27.7	4.5	3.0	15.8	5.7	11.0	32.2	4.0	207
An independent study program at a drop-in centre	12.5	3.4	1.8	26.2	18.0	13.6	24.5	5.0	203
Studying one-on-one with a tutor	20.5	3.4	4.3	13.3	9.5	9.0	40.0	5.0	209
Studying in a small group of 5-10 students	7.2	1.0	3.6	15.9	11.7	18.4	42.3	6.0	209
Studying in a classroom of 10-15 students	9.9	2.1	5.1	25.6	14.2	16.9	26.2	5.0	209
Studying in a classroom of more than 15 students	19.5	6.6	5.3	32.0	12.8	8.1	15.8	4.0	209
Discontinuers									
Studying independently at home through correspondence	30.4	4.7	7.5	17.4	12.7	7.2	20.1	4.0	201
A television course where you tune in or they send video	47.8	9.5	3.2	10.5	10.0	7.0	12.0	2.0	200
A program using the Internet to talk to instructor	43.6	5.9	7.9	9.8	12.2	4.7	15.9	3.0	193
An independent study program at a drop-in centre	24.1	6.3	10.0	25.0	10.0	8.8	15.8	4.0	200
Studying one-on-one with a tutor	25.7	8.5	7.2	17.1	12.5	9.5	19.5	4.0	200
Studying in a small group of 5-10 students	8.5	2.4	5.4	17.4	16.7	14.6	35.0	5.0	201

TABLE 5.13 **Interest in program formats (cont.)**

	Not at all interested 1	2	3	Moderately interested 4	5	6	Extremely interested 7	Median	Count
Studying in a classroom of 10-15 students	13.3	3.3	7.1	26.8	23.3	6.7	19.4	4.0	201
Studying in a classroom of more than 15 students	24.6	7.7	10.8	24.5	15.4	6.6	10.5	4.0	200
All	29.5	6.8	6.9	16.2	12.1	9.8	18.7	4.0	864
Studying independently at home through correspondence	41.7	7.0	4.9	15.3	10.5	6.7	13.9	3.0	861
A television course where you tune in or they send video	38.3	4.8	5.0	13.4	8.6	9.1	20.8	4.0	844
A program using the Internet to talk to instructor	21.1	6.3	7.2	24.6	13.8	11.1	16.0	4.0	856
An independent study program at a drop-in centre	24.9	7.2	5.2	17.9	9.8	9.8	25.3	4.0	856
Studying one-on-one with a tutor	10.9	3.0	5.0	19.5	13.7	15.6	32.2	5.0	862
Studying in a small group of 5-10 students	13.6	3.9	6.5	27.1	16.6	12.1	20.2	4.0	866
Studying in a classroom of 10-15 students	26.2	7.8	9.2	25.8	11.7	7.6	11.8	4.0	861
Studying in a classroom of more than 15 students									

Discontinuers, as might be expected, evidence less enthusiasm across the board, compared to those expecting to take courses. On average, those expecting to take a course give one of the two highest ratings to at least three formats; in the case of Discontinuers, on average, two formats receive high ratings. There are, moreover, sharp differences in interest in specific formats. In particular, Discontinuers are much less oriented to new distance education formats - either television or Internet. Over 40 per cent indicate that they are not at all interested in upgrading in this format. More surprising is the fact that Discontinuers show a clear preference for small group sessions over one to one tutoring, a pattern not found among those expecting to take a course.

Program location

In their choice of program locations, Persisters and others who expect to take a program in the next five years and Discontinuers show a strong antipathy to learning in public settings. Over half of interviewees anticipating taking a program said they were not at all comfortable in using a coffee shop, restaurant or pub as the locale; two thirds of Discontinuers held this view (see Table 5.14 on page 116). Workplace programs based on site are also unpopular, though to a lesser extent.

TABLE 5.14 **Comfort level with location formats**

	Not at all comfort-able 1	2	3	Moderately comfortable 4	5	6	Extremely comfortable 7	Median	Count
Persisters/others who might take a program in next 5 years	9.2	3.7	6.3	25.4	12.6	17.2	25.6	5.0	209
A local community centre	10.6	0.3	3.4	28.6	17.1	11.0	29.0	5.0	209
A public library	37.9	4.2	6.2	22.5	5.8	10.4	13.0	4.0	209
A local church or other religious institution	54.7	10.4	3.1	15.5	4.9	3.6	7.9	1.0	209
A coffee shop, restaurant, or pub	6.3	4.7	2.5	19.2	19.1	14.3	33.9	5.0	209
A classroom at a local school	9.3	1.2	3.5	17.2	18.7	14.8	35.3	5.7	209
A classroom at a local college or university	32.1	12.2	4.6	20.8	7.6	5.6	17.0	4.0	201
Your place of work, for example in a meeting room									
Discontinuers	15.3	1.7	12.6	27.7	15.5	10.0	17.2	4.0	201
A local community centre	12.5	6.2	5.7	28.7	14.1	17.5	15.4	4.0	201
A public library	34.7	8.1	5.8	20.1	10.0	8.8	12.4	4.0	201
A local church or other religious institution	66.8	9.1	5.6	10.4	3.3	1.4	3.5	1.0	200
A coffee shop, restaurant, or pub	13.9	2.8	9.5	24.1	17.6	9.0	23.1	4.0	201
A classroom at a local school	13.0	3.5	6.2	30.0	16.8	11.0	19.5	4.0	201
A classroom at a local college or university	38.0	6.1	8.7	18.3	10.4	8.2	10.3	3.0	180
Your place of work, for example in a meeting room									
All									

TABLE 5.14 **Comfort level with location formats (cont.)**

	Not at all comfort-able 1	2	3	Moderately comfortable 4	5	6	Extremely comfortable 7	Median	Count
A local community centre	14.2	3.0	8.2	28.9	15.4	11.8	18.5	4.0	860
A public library	12.2	3.8	5.4	29.5	15.4	12.8	20.9	4.0	865
A local church or other religious institution	33.8	5.9	5.9	22.2	9.1	8.9	14.2	4.0	865
A coffee shop, restaurant, or pub?	58.0	10.1	5.4	11.4	4.8	2.8	7.5	1.0	864
A classroom at a local school	12.5	4.4	6.9	24.4	16.0	11.2	24.6	5.0	865
A classroom at a local college or university	15.0	4.1	5.7	23.9	16.3	11.0	23.9	5.0	864
Your place of work, for example in a meeting room	33.1	7.2	7.4	20.7	9.6	7.4	14.6	4.0	804

Among those expecting to take a program, a classroom in a local school, or a local college or university is the preferred venue. A third say they would be extremely comfortable in these settings; less than 10 per cent indicate they would be not at all comfortable. Among Discontinuers there is no one clearly preferred location.

CHAPTER 6

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The peril in survey research is the possibility of drowning in data, of uncovering so many little trends that it is difficult to understand the significance of the findings. To minimize that peril, we view the results through a lens set back a distance from the individual findings.

How does this report add to our knowledge about why only a small fraction of eligible adults with low literacy skills ever enrols in upgrading programs?

☐ First, it deals with true nonparticipants rather than depending on the memory or reinterpretation of those who are already enrolled about why they did not do so previously.

☐ Second, it is information based on a random stratified sample of the Canadian population and its findings can, therefore, be generalized beyond the sample.

☐ Third, it address questions relating to past behaviour and reasons for past behaviour as well as future intentions.

☐ Fourth, it seeks to identify a range of factors: socioeconomic/circumstantial (SEC), cognitive-emotive (CE) and program/policy-related (PPR) that contribute to people's reasons for making the choices they make. These factors, also identified in a previous study (*Patterns of Participation*, Long and Middleton 2001), represent an effort to bridge the gap between structural theories and agency/attitudinal theories that characterize the literature on literacy.

The current report builds and elaborates on some of the findings in Stage One in which a small nationwide sample of 44 nonparticipants were interviewed. All of the respondents in that report were affected by multiple factors. These factors were highly interrelated, sometimes occurring in clusters, and clearly ebbed and flowed over time. While it is difficult to generalize, the survey revealed one pattern in operation for many respondents.

Much of the time respondents were not thinking about upgrading their skills or seeking out a literacy program. They felt they did not need more literacy skills because they were coping adequately without enrolling in a program. This mode of thinking continued until a certain event or transition in their lives brought the issue up. Before they could get as far as seeking out a program, other factors came into play that prevented them from pursuing the idea, for instance needing to support a family, feeling they were too old, or imagining that the classes would be too hard. This report provides further support for this pattern.

This report, using data from the large random sample, placed more emphasis on detailed examination of the relationship between respondents' assessments of their skills in reading, writing, and mathematics and their intentions to take an upgrading program or finish a high school diploma. Looking at the expectations of taking upgrading programs, the reasons for so doing, the likelihood that the interviewee had thought about doing it beforehand, the relationship between doing it beforehand and expecting to do it in the future, provided both a typology of Persisters and Discontinuers and much information about the motivations for taking upgrading programs.

In fact, self-assessment of skills that led to membership in a high need group was found to be a good predictor of expecting to take an upgrading program, especially for those who are young, and those who had completed some high school. It is a good predictor as well of sustained interest in taking a program once having considered it and of encouraging a persistent, active interest in upgrading.

The report's main purpose is to investigate factors that prevent people who might benefit from literacy and upgrading programs from actually contacting and enrolling in programs. What happens to those who show such an active and persistent interest in upgrading? They report concerns related to work, family, and finances that deter them from taking upgrading programs. Women with children have particular concerns about childcare and female single parents are especially concerned about money and about the distance of the program.

Those who indicated an intention to take a program in the next five years are attracted to many kinds of program formats but especially to studying one-on-one with a tutor and small group sessions of 5-10 students. Program locations in classrooms of schools and postsecondary institutions are the preferred venues.

The findings allow us to address the central aim of this survey and achieve its central goal: to uncover ways of increasing appeal and improving future policy and practice relating to adult basic education. We do so by looking at ways to improve the opportunities for these highly-motivated people to avail themselves of adult learning.

The pervasiveness of socioeconomic/circumstantial factors, especially related to work, family and finances, suggests some of the approaches that might be used.

- ☐ Outreach to potential learners can be strengthened if accompanied by outreach to employers and to unions. Some examples are:
  - ☐ Employers and unions could indicate that they are supportive of any efforts by their employees and members to improve their skills.
  - ☐ Employers and unions could negotiate terms and conditions of employment that make it possible and realistic for employees to engage in upgrading programs, e.g., paid time off and payment of costs associated with the program.
  - ☐ Employers could reward employees for successfully completing upgrading programs - with salary increases, promotions, increased responsibility and further opportunities for upgrading.

- ☐ Outreach to potential learners can be strengthened if accompanied by attempts to find solutions to the family problems that concern them. Some examples are.
  - ☐ Providing high quality childcare, in close proximity to the classroom, for parents of small children who take programs.
  - ☐ Providing high quality eldercare for those with these responsibilities either on-site where feasible or by provision of bursaries to cover the expense of surrogate care.
  - ☐ In smaller communities, it may be possible to broker cooperation among potential learners with similar family responsibilities.
  - ☐ Offering the possibility of learning situations in which families can participate together.
- ☐ Outreach to potential learners can be strengthened if accompanied by providing ways to ease the financial problems associated with taking upgrading.
  - ☐ Providing some form of income supplement (such as scholarships) for potential learners to participate in upgrading programs.
  - ☐ Recognizing and trying to offset some of the expenses associated with taking upgrading programs, such as the costs of transportation, childcare, eldercare, meals, clothing, tuition, and materials.

With respect to the cognitive-emotive concerns, especially nervousness about taking an upgrading program, outreach efforts can be strengthened by addressing the potential feelings and fears of learners.

- ☐ Acknowledge that most people feel nervous and anxious when they start a program, and that it's often difficult to take the first step. Reassure potential learners that there are lots of others in the same situation and that most soon feel comfortable.
  - ☐ Provide reassurance that adult education teachers and tutors have special training and sensitivity for dealing with adults who have not been in school for a long time, and may not have had success in school. Some tutors and mentors may have even once been adult learners themselves. In other words, teachers have patience and understanding. No one will try to embarrass them in front of the class.
  - ☐ Acknowledge that people may be uncertain or hesitant as to whether they want to get involved in upgrading, or are nervous.

  - ☐ Acknowledge the challenges inherent in adult learning; for example, the difficulty in finding time among other responsibilities, the fears people may have about being too old or failing. Then suggest that having met life's challenges to date, they can meet these new ones, too.
- ☐ Emphasize success.
  - ☐ Suggest that people who consider adult learning are smart for being able to recognize the gaps in their education and for wanting to invest in themselves and their futures.
  - ☐ Show success stories of real people who took part in adult learning to improve their reading, writing, or math. These are especially effective if people tell their own stories, in their own words, including any troubles they had in school as kids and how they felt about returning to learn as an adult. Develop a student speaker's bureau to help in community outreach.
  - ☐ Present learning and upgrading as moving forward with one's life, opening doors, providing opportunities, being an important step in achieving one's dreams, and looking to the future.
  - ☐ Focus on the fact that many programs also teach computer skills to new users. Stress that technology can help to make learning more interesting and easier.

With respect to program/policy-related factors that were of concern to interviewees, especially program length, level of difficulty, working at own pace, and relevance of program content, the following suggestions are made:

- ☐ Use images and concepts that help dislodge the assumption that adult learning will be similar to early schooling.
- ☐ Use outreach to dispel myths by explaining exactly what classes, learning groups, or tutoring are like, who the learners and teachers are, and what kinds of materials are used. It would be particularly helpful to emphasize that programs are:
  - ☐ Almost always for adults only -- they don't mix adults with kids and teenagers.
  - ☐ For adults of all ages. Show images of older people learning, along with images of learners from 20-55. Offer information about the ability of older people to take in new information. Scientific research shows that people continue their ability to learn new things their whole life and the more older people continue to learn, the more they can learn.

- ☐ For people who didn't have the opportunity to go further in school (those who missed out), who didn't get the help they needed to be successful in school, who were bored in school, or even "for people who believed or were made to feel they weren't smart in school." "It's for people just like you!"
- ☐ Not "one size fits all". Depending on the programs in your community and the way that you like to learn, you may learn one-on-one with a tutor, study in a small group, study on the Internet with help from a tutor, or be part of a larger class that's more like a college class.
- ☐ Not at all like school was. While some programs are still more traditional, many work hard to meet the individualized needs of each student. Adult learners also have far more control over their learning environment than they did as children in school, and they do not have to stay in a situation that feels uncomfortable. People don't have to sit at the front of the class if they don't want to. In fact, the "classroom" might be just a group of people sitting around a table, or a pair working next to each other at a desk. Learners don't have to sit in a chair for hours on end and they can get up and leave the classroom at their own discretion.
- ☐ Not a matter of picking up where one left off. Learners don't have to go back to where they left off and repeat every grade. For adults, with all their life experience, it's possible and probable to fast track.
- ☐ Not expensive, and usually free. Help with transportation and childcare costs may even be available.
- ☐ Not just for people who are at the most basic level. Learners can upgrade all the way up to Grade 12, or finish a high school diploma, or learn to write a resume and business letter, or learn to use a computer to send e-mail.
- ☐ For people who like to set their own pace or stop and start when they need to.
- ☐ Of differing lengths; some shorter, some longer, depending on learners' goals.

☐ It is also important to reinforce that the assessment of adult reading and writing skills is not usually based on a grade level. It's a different system and often, the assessment is based simply on working towards reading and writing goals that learners set for themselves.

The program format and location preferences of interviewees in this report are clear for those intending to take upgrading programs—one-on-one learning and learning in small (5-10 person) groups were the preferred formats, and classrooms in educational institutions the preferred locations. Although adult education programs must remain flexible and offer a wide range of possible formats and locations, the results of this report suggest that the favoured formats and locations constitute the strongest pull factors related to programs.

APPENDIX A

QUESTIONNAIRE

Hello, my name is...and I work for EKOS Research Associates. We are conducting a survey on a number of educational topics on behalf of a national, educational organization called ABC CANADA. We are looking to talk to Canadians between the ages of 18 and 69 who do not have a high school diploma. Is there anyone in your household that I could speak to who meets this description?

[If respondent says that s/he is not interested in educational programs]

"Even if you are not interested in taking educational programs, your opinions can help ABC CANADA help others who might be interested."

[If respondent does not meet the criteria code as "IG".]

We are also looking to talk to people who have never taken a program to upgrade their reading, writing, or math skills, or to get high school credits since leaving school. Do you meet this criterion as well?

[If Yes:]

"The interview takes about 15 minutes to complete.All your reponses will be kept completely confidential. May I begin?

[If respondent does not meet the criteria, code as "12"]

SEX *(Do not ask;record gender of respondent)*

Male	1
Female	2

Q1

Do you know of any programs in your community for adults who want to upgrade reading, writing, or math, or get their high school equivalency diploma?

Yes	1
No	2
Refused	9

Q2 *(Do not read list)*

If an adult in your community asked you for advice about how to find a program to upgrade reading, writing, or math, or complete their high school diploma, where would you tell them to look?

High school	01
College	02
Community college	03
Other (specify)	97
Don't know	98
Refused	99

Q3

What about yourself? At any time since leaving high school have you ever thought about the idea of taking a program to upgrade reading, writing, or math, or to get your high school diploma, even if it was only a brief thought?

Yes	1
No	2
Don't know	8
Refused	9

Q4 *(Do not read list)*

What would you say was the main reason that you thought about the idea of taking a program or getting your high school diploma?

Work related	01
Upgrading to enter other education or training programs	02
Family, community, daily living reasons	03
General education purposes	04
Other (specify)	97
Don't know	98
Refused	99

Q5

In the last five years, have you ever thought about the idea of taking a program that would lead to a university degree or college certificate or diploma?

Yes	1
No	2
Don't know	8
Refused	9

Q6

If you decided that you wanted to take a program of that type, do you think you could enter the program directly, or would you need to upgrade your reading, writing, or math, or get your high school diploma first?

Enter directly	1
Reading, writing, and math	2
Math only	3
High school diploma	4
Just specific high school course(s) (e.g., chemistry)	5
Don't know	8
Refused	9

Q7

Do you think you might take a program to upgrade your reading, writing, or math, or to get your high school diploma sometime in the next five years?

Yes	1
No	2
Maybe	3
Just certain course(s)	4
Don't know	8
Refused	9

Q8

Have you ever heard of the GED? It's a test that adults can write to get their high school equivalency diploma.

Yes	1
No	2
Maybe	3
Don't know	8
Refused	9

Q9

Thinking back, what would you say was the main reason that you left school before graduating?

(Note to interviewer - IF Respondent says "not interested or I did not like it" ASK - can you be more specific about "why you did not like it or why were you not interested")

Response	01
Don't know	98
Refused	99
Not interested	1
Other	2

Q10 *(Probe for more information if necessary.)*

Thinking back to the time between leaving school and now, what would you say is the main reason that you've not taken a program to upgrade your reading, writing or math, or to get your high school diploma?

Response (capture a complete sentence - be specific)	01
Don't know	98
Refused	99

Q11

(Probe for more information if necessary.)

Thinking back to the time between leaving school and now, what would you say is the main reason that you have not thought about the idea of taking a program to upgrade your reading, writing, or math, or to get your high school diploma?

Response	01
Don't know	98
Refused	99

I'm going to read you a list of concerns that people may have when they think about the idea of taking a program or getting their high school diploma.For each item that I read, please say whether it is something that would concern you when you think about the idea of taking a program. Please respond using a 7-point scale where 1 means not at all concerned, 7 means extremely concerned, and the midpoint 4 means moderately concerned.

Q12

How concerned would you be that...

The program might take too long to complete

1 Not at all concerned	1
2	2
3	3
4 Moderately concerned	4
5	5
6	6
7 Extremely concerned	7
Don't know	8
Refused	9

Q13

Even if you said earlier that you are not interested in actually taking a program, it would be helpful for us to understand what you think.

How concerned would you be that...

The program might not be relevant to your daily life

1 Not at all concerned	1
2	2
3	3
4 Moderately concerned	4
5	5
6	6
7 Extremely concerned	7
Don't know	8
Refused	9

Q14

How concerned would you be that...

The program might be too far away

1 Not at all concerned	1
2	2
3	3
4 Moderately concerned	4
5	5
6	6
7 Extremely concerned	7
Don't know	8
Refused	9

Q15

How concerned would you be that...

The program might cost money

1 Not at all concerned	1
2	2
3	3
4 Moderately concerned	4
5	5
6	6
7 Extremely concerned	7
Don't know	8
Refused	9

Q16

How concerned would you be that...

The transportation would cost too much

1 Not at all concerned	1
2	2
3	3
4 Moderately concerned	4
5	5
6	6
7 Extremely concerned	7
Don't know	8
Refused	9

Q17

How concerned would you be about...

Money problems in general

1 Not at all concerned	1
2	2
3	3
4 Moderately concerned	4
5	5
6	6
7 Extremely concerned	7
Don't know	8
Refused	9

Q18

How concerned would you be about...

Difficulties in arranging childcare for your children

1 Not at all concerned	01
2	02
3	03
4 Moderately concerned	04
5	05
6	06
7 Extremely concerned	07
Not applicable - no children	97
Don't know	98
Refused	99

Q19

How concerned would you be that...

A program might conflict with your job

1 Not at all concerned	1
2	2
3	3
4 Moderately concerned	4
5	5
6	6
7 Extremely concerned	7
Don't know	8
Refused	9

Q20

How concerned would you be that...

The skills you would learn in a program might not be related to your work

1 Not at all concerned	1
2	2
3	3
4 Moderately concerned	4
5	5
6	6
7 Extremely concerned	7
Don't know	8
Refused	9

Q21

How concerned would you be that...

You might be older than other students in the program

1 Not at all concerned	1
2	2
3	3
4 Moderately concerned	4
5	5
6	6
7 Extremely concerned	7
Don't know	8
Refused	9

Q22

How concerned would you be that...

You would feel worried or nervous about taking a program

1 Not at all concerned	1
2	2
3	3
4 Moderately concerned	4
5	5
6	6
7 Extremely concerned	7
Don't know	8
Refused	9

Q23

How concerned would you be that...

Your family members might not be supportive of you taking a program

1 Not at all concerned	1
2	2
3	3
4 Moderately concerned	4
5	5
6	6
7 Extremely concerned	7
Don't know	8
Refused	9

Q24

How concerned would you be that...

The program might be too difficult

1 Not at all concerned	1
2	2
3	3
4 Moderately concerned	4
5	5
6	6
7 Extremely concerned	7
Don't know	8
Refused	9

Q25

How concerned would you be that...

You might feel embarrassed if your family, friends, or co-workers knew you were taking a program

1 Not at all concerned	1
2	2
3	3
4 Moderately concerned	4
5	5
6	6
7 Extremely concerned	7
Don't know	8
Refused	9

Q26

How concerned would you be that...

The teacher might not be friendly

1 Not at all concerned	1
2	2
3	3
4 Moderately concerned	4
5	5
6	6
7 Extremely concerned	7
Don't know	8
Refused	9

Q27

How concerned would you be that...

The other students might not be friendly

1 Not at all concerned	1
2	2
3	3
4 Moderately concerned	4
5	5
6	6
7 Extremely concerned	7
Don't know	8
Refused	9

Q28

How concerned would you be that...

You might feel embarrassed in the program

1 Not at all concerned	1
2	2
3	3
4 Moderately concerned	4
5	5
6	6
7 Extremely concerned	7
Don't know	8
Refused	9

Q29

How concerned would you be that...

The program might be too rigid and structured

1 Not at all concerned	1
2	2
3	3
4 Moderately concerned	4
5	5
6	6
7 Extremely concerned	7
Don't know	8
Refused	9

Q30

How concerned would you be that...

You might not get enough one-on-one attention

1 Not at all concerned	1
2	2
3	3
4 Moderately concerned	4
5	5
6	6
7 Extremely concerned	7
Don't know	8
Refused	9

Q31

How concerned would you be that...

You might not be able to work at your own pace

1 Not at all concerned	1
2	2
3	3
4 Moderately concerned	4
5	5
6	6
7 Extremely concerned	7
Don't know	8
Refused	9

Q32

How concerned would you be that...

You might not be treated as an adult

1 Not at all concerned	1
2	2
3	3
4 Moderately concerned	4
5	5
6	6
7 Extremely concerned	7
Don't know	8
Refused	9

Q33

How concerned would you be that...

You think it might be too late for you to learn

1 Not at all concerned	1
2	2
3	3
4 Moderately concerned	4
5	5
6	6
7 Extremely concerned	7
Don't know	8
Refused	9

There are many different types of programs for people to upgrade their reading, writing or math skills, or to get their high school diploma. I'm going to read you a list of various types of programs. Please indicate how interested you would be in each program, using a 7-point scale where 1 means not at all interested, 7 means extremely interested, and the mid-point 4 means moderately interested.

Q34

How interested would you be in...

Studying independently at home through a correspondence program, where you get print materials and audio tapes through the mail

1 Not at all interested	1
2	2
3	3
4 Moderately interested	4
5	5
6	6
7 Extremely interested	7
Don't know	8
Refused	9

Q35

Even if you said earlier that you're not interested in taking a program, it would be helpful for us to understand what you think about different options.

How interested would you be in...

A television course where you tune in or they send you videocassettes

1 Not at all interested	1
2	2
3	3
4 Moderately interested	4
5	5
6	6
7 Extremely interested	7
Don't know	8
Refused	9

Q36

How interested would you be in...

A program using the Internet where you can talk to your instructor and other students using a computer

1 Not at all interested	1
2	2
3	3
4 Moderately interested	4
5	5
6	6
7 Extremely interested	7
Don't know	8
Refused	9

Q37

How interested would you be in...

An independent study program at a drop-in centre somewhere in your community

1 Not at all interested	1
2	2
3	3
4 Moderately interested	4
5	5
6	6
7 Extremely interested	7
Don't know	8
Refused	9

Q38

How interested would you be in...

Studying one-on-one with a tutor

1 Not at all interested	1
2	2
3	3
4 Moderately interested	4
5	5
6	6
7 Extremely interested	7
Don't know	8
Refused	9

Q39

How interested would you be in...

Studying in a small group of 5-10 students working with a teacher

1 Not at all interested	1
2	2
3	3
4 Moderately interested	4
5	5
6	6
7 Extremely interested	7
Don't know	8
Refused	9

Q40

How interested would you be in...

Studying in a classroom of 10-15 students working with a teacher

1 Not at all interested	1
2	2
3	3
4 Moderately interested	4
5	5
6	6
7 Extremely interested	7
Don't know	8
Refused	9

Q41

How interested would you be in...

Studying in a classroom of more than 15 students working with a teacher

1 Not at all interested	1
2	2
3	3
4 Moderately interested	4
5	5
6	6
7 Extremely interested	7
Don't know	8
Refused	9

Q42

How comfortable do you think you would you feel studying in each of the following locations? Please respond using a 7-point scale where 1 means not at all comfortable, 7 means extremely comfortable, and the mid-point 4 means moderately comfortable.

How comfortable would you feel studying at...

A local community centre

1 Not at all comfortable	1
2	2
3	3
4 Moderately comfortable	4
5	5
6	6
7 Extremely comfortable	7
Don't know	8
Refused	9

Q43

How comfortable would you feel studying at...

A public library

1 Not at all comfortable	1
2	2
3	3
4 Moderately comfortable	4
5	5
6	6
7 Extremely comfortable	7
Don't know	8
Refused	9

Q44

How comfortable would you feel studying at...

A local church or other religious institution

1 Not at all comfortable	1
2	2
3	3
4 Moderately comfortable	4
5	5
6	6
7 Extremely comfortable	7
Don't know	8
Refused	9

Q45

How comfortable would you feel studying at...

A coffee shop, restaurant, or pub

1 Not at all comfortable	1
2	2
3	3
4 Moderately comfortable	4
5	5
6	6
7 Extremely comfortable	7
Don't know	8
Refused	9

Q46

How comfortable would you feel studying at...

A classroom at a local school

1 Not at all comfortable	1
2	2
3	3
4 Moderately comfortable	4
5	5
6	6
7 Extremely comfortable	7
Don't know	8
Refused	9

Q47

How comfortable would you feel studying at...

A classroom at a local college or university

1 Not at all comfortable	1
2	2
3	3
4 Moderately comfortable	4
5	5
6	6
7 Extremely comfortable	7
Don't know	8
Refused	9

Q48

How comfortable would you feel studying at...

Your place of work, for example in a meeting room

1 Not at all comfortable	1
2	2
3	3
4 Moderately comfortable	4
5	5
6	6
7 Extremely comfortable	7
Don't know	8
Refused	9

Q49

In general, would you say your reading skills in English are excellent, good, moderate, or poor?

Excellent	1
Good	2
Moderate	3
Poor	4
Don't know	8
Refused	9

Q50

In general, would you say your writing skills in English are excellent, good, moderate, or poor?

Excellent	1
Good	2
Moderate	3
Poor	4
Don't know	8
Refused	9

Q51

In general, would you say your math skills are excellent, good, moderate, or poor?

Excellent	1
Good	2
Moderate	3
Poor	4
Don't know	8
Refused	9

Q52

Select all that apply

Do you ever ask friends, co-workers, or family members to help you with reading, writing, or math?

***If "yes," ask "Which ones?"*

Reading	1
Writing	2
Math	3
No	4X
Don't know	8X
Refused	9X

DEMIN

Finally, these last questions are to help us compare the experiences of different groups of people.

EDUCATION

What is the highest grade in school that you have completed?

***Note to interviewer: Enter in the space provided their grade (ie., Grade 7 = 07)*

No formal education	00
Other (specify)	97
Don't know	98
Refused	99

LANGUAGE

What is the language that you first learned at home in childhood and still understand?

English	01
French	02
Italian	03
German	04
Spanish	05
Portuguese	06
Chinese	07
Japanese	08
Other	97
Don't know	98
Refused	99

BORN

In what country were you born?

Canada	01
USA	02
UK (England, Scotland, Ireland, Wales)	03
Australia/New Zealand	04
Western Europe (France, Germany, Italy, etc.)	05
Eastern Europe (Hungary, Poland, Czech Republic, etc.)	06
Asian (China, Japan, Taiwan, etc.)	07
African (Kenya, Ethiopia, , etc.)	08
South American (Brazil, Peru, etc.)	09
Other	97
Don't know	98
Refused	99

YEAR

In what year were you born?

Enter the full year, (e.g., 1954)

Don't know	9998
Refused	9999

HOUSE

Read list; select all that apply.

Which of the following are part of your household?

Spouse or partner	1
Children under 18	2
Other relatives (e.g., grandparents)	3
Other people (e.g., friends, boarders)	4
(Do not read) . None of the above	7X
(Do not read) . Don't know	8X
(Do not read). Refused	9X

SOURCE

What is your main source of income right now?

*****If respondent is employed, ask whether their job is full-time or part-time and permanent or seasonal.*

Full-time permanent job	01
Full-time seasonal job	02
Part-time permanent job	03
Part-time seasonal job	04
Social assistance/Long-term disability	05
Employment Insurance	06
Other (specify)	97
Don't know	98
Refused	99

INCOME

Into which of these broad categories does your total annual household income before taxes fall into?

Less than $20,000	1
$20,000-$29,999	2
$30,000-$39,999	3
$40,000 or more	4
(DO NOT READ) . Don't know	8
(DO NOT READ) . Refused	9

CITY

What is the name of the town or city in which you live?

Response	010
Don't know	98
Refused	99

SIZE

What is the population of the town or city in which you live?

Less than 15,000	1
15,000 to 99,999	2
100,000 to 499,999	3
500,000 or more	4
Don't know	8
Refused	9

PANEL

If we decide to do another education survey in the future, may we contact you again?

Yes	1
No	2

NAME

May I have your first name, in the event that someone calls you back for another interview in the future?

THANK

End of Interview

Thank you for your cooperation and time!

Completion ID

APPENDIX B

TABLE B.1 Response rate – general public

Call Classification	Total
Initial sample	22,510
(less) Unused sample	0
(less) Attrition	
Number not in service	3,313
Duplicate	4
Language Barrier (not English or French)	424
Functional sample	18,769
Other	
No answer/busy	5,396
Unavailable for duration of survey	14
Retired (called 6 or more times)	178
Other/illness	44
Total "other" numbers	5,632
Total refusals	2,714
Refusal rate	14.5%
Co-operative calls	
Completed	306
Ineligible	10,117
Total Co-operative Calls	10,423
Response rate	55.5%

TABLE B.2 Response rate - targeted sample

Call Classification	**Total**
Initial sample	5,023
(less) Unused sample	0
(less) Attrition	
Number not in service	469
Duplicate	0
Language Barrier (not English or French)	35
Functional sample	4,519
Other	
No answer/busy	246
Unavailable for duration of survey	8
Retired (called 6 or more times)	78
Other/illness	14
Total "other" numbers	346
Total refusals	821
Refusal rate	18.2%
Co-operative calls	
Completed	560
Ineligible	2,792
Total Co-operative Calls	3,352
Response rate	74.2%

TABLE B.3 Response rate –targeted and general public sample

Call Classification	Total
Initial sample	27,533
(less) Unused sample	0
(less) Attrition	
Number not in service	3,782
Duplicate	4
Language Barrier (not English or French)	459
Functional sample	23,288
Other	
No answer/busy	5,642
Unavailable for duration of survey	22
Retired (called 6 or more times)	256
Other/illness	58
Total "other" numbers	5,978
Total refusals	3,535
Refusal rate	15.2%
Co-operative calls	
Completed	866
Ineligible	12,909
Total Co-operative Calls	13,775
Response rate	59.2%

TABLE B.4 Weighting age group[1]

Age Group	Weighting
20-24	.0689
25-34	.1641
35-44	.2110
45-54	.2064
55-64	.2279
65-69	.1217

1.Note: Respondents in the 18-19 age group were not weighted for age, due to small sample size.

TABLE B.5 Weighting education level

Education Level	Weighting
Grade 1-4	.0732
Grade 5-8	.2732
Grade 9-10	.3306
Grade 11-13	.3230

TABLE B.6 Weighting gender

Gender	Weighting
Male	.4867
Female	.5133

TABLE B.7 Weighting province[1]

Province	Weighting
British Columbia	.1171
Alberta	.0879
Saskatchewan	.0411
Manitoba	.0451
Ontario	.3553
Quebec	2568
New Brunswick	.0301
Nova Scotia	.0358
Prince Edward Island	.0055
Newfoundland	.0253

1. Note: Respondents from Yukon Territory, Northwest Territories, or Nunavut were not weighted for province, due to small sample size

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Glossary

"Aha" moments Times when the motivation to take a program suddenly increases. These moments generally emerge during transitions when it occurs to someone that it would be advantageous to upgrade his or her literacy skills. Common "aha" moments include birth of a child or job loss.

Cognitive-emotive factors Thoughts or feelings about taking programs that can be analytical (i.e.,cognitive) or psychological (i.e., emotive). Examples include an objective assessment of the value of the program in relation to needs or a sense of fear or embarrassment.

Discontinuer Someone who has thought about taking a program at some point since leaving school but who no longer thinks about the idea.

Diversionary factors Life occurrences or perceptions that make literacy or upgrading programs feel unnecessary or unattainable. Examples include well-developed coping strategies (e.g., asking others for help with reading or writing), or too many family responsibilities.

Intervening factors Life context that intercedes between an "Aha" moment and enrolment in a program. (Intervening factors are often the same as diversionary factors.)

Socioeconomic-circumstantial factors A variety of financially demanding and/or time consuming circumstances such as low pay, job hours and family responsibilities.

Persister Someone who has thought about taking a program at some point since leaving school and who still thinks about the idea.

Program/policy-related factors A variety of barriers to participation that relate to programs themselves, such as large class sizes, limited range of programming or tuition fees.

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